The Grio (11/25, Chandler, 132K) reported, "Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) is one of the leading immunologists in the world, serving in the role at the NIH institute since 1984." The Grio spoke with Fauci "to discuss the pandemic outlooks, necessary steps to curtail the coronavirus spikes, and much more." When he was "asked where the nation sits in regards to our handling of the pandemic and how best to move forward, Fauci did not mince words," saying, "Well, we're in a very precarious situation in that if you look at the slope, the trajectory of the curve that's gone up now in what I would consider the third surge that we've had – the first one, as you remember, was in the very early spring in the northeastern part of the country, dominated by the New York metropolitan area."

Machine Learning Tool Detects COVID-19 On X-Rays Faster, More Accurately Than Thoracic Radiologists, Study Indicates.

Health IT Analytics (11/25, Kent) reported, "A machine learning tool was able to detect COVID-19 in x-ray images about ten times faster and one to six percent more accurately than specialized thoracic radiologists, according to a study (11/24, Wehbe, 6K) published in Radiology." According to Health IT Analytics, "machine learning and AI have played a large role in improving medical imaging analytics during the pandemic." In August, the "NIH launched the Medical Imaging and Data Resource Center (MIDRC), [a] project to leverage AI and medical imaging to enhance COVID-19 detection and treatment." This "effort is led by the National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering (NIBIB)."

Dr. Collins Discuses COVID-19 Vaccines.

MSNBC Velshi & Ruhle (11/28, 1.81M) aired an interview with Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health. Dr. Collins discussed the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines, and said, "Politics have nothing to do with this."

Turkey Resumes Reporting All Positive Coronavirus Tests, Pushing Daily New Cases To Over 30,000.

The AP (11/29, Fraser) reports, "In an about-face, [Turkish] President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government this week resumed reporting all positive coronavirus tests – not just the number of patients being treated for symptoms – pushing the number of daily cases to above 30,000." Counting "the new data, the country jumped from being one of the least-affected countries in Europe to one of the worst-hit." The change "came as no surprise to the Turkish Medical Association, which has been warning for months that the government's previous figures were concealing the graveness of the spread and that the lack of transparency was contributing to the surge." The association "maintains, however, that the ministry's figures are still low compared with its estimate of at least 50,000 new infections per day."

Reuters (11/29, Koca) reports, "Coronavirus deaths in Turkey rose to a record for the seventh consecutive day on Sunday and the number of new cases remained high despite efforts by President Tayyip Erdogan's government to contain a second wave of infections."

Brazil's Bolsonaro Says He Will Not Take Any Working COVID-19 Vaccine, Disparages Mask Wearing.

The AP (11/27, Savarese) reported, "Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro says he won't take any working COVID-19 vaccine himself and calls the use of masks to limit the spread of the disease 'the last taboo to fall.'" His "comments, broadcast on his social media channels Thursday night, alarmed health experts who said they could undermine efforts to achieve vaccination levels essential to halting the pandemic and might scare off vaccine makers negotiating with local authorities." The leader "also said, however, that any shot that is certified by Brazil's health agency will be available for free to the public."

Vaccinations Against COVID-19 May Not Start In Africa Until Second Quarter Next Year, Senior Health Official Says.

The AP (11/26, Anna) reported, "Vaccinations against COVID-19 in Africa might not start until the second quarter of next year," the director of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention John Nkengasong "said Thursday, adding that it will be 'extremely dangerous' if more developed parts of the world vaccinate themselves and then restrict travel to people with proof of a vaccination."

African Union Discussing COVID-19 Vaccine Trial Partnerships With China, Russia. Bloomberg (11/25, Kew, 4.73M) reported, "the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the African Union have discussed COVID-19 vaccine trial partnerships with both China and Russia, part of an effort to ensure Africa is not last in the queue for vaccines when they become available."

Austria Should Expect Further Heavy Restrictions When Current National Lockdown Expires, Chancellor Says.

Reuters (11/29, Neghaiwi) reports, "Austria should expect further heavy restrictions when its current lockdown measures expire in just over a week, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz told Austrian paper Kleine Zeitung." Although "Austria's nationwide lockdown is due to be lifted on Dec. 7," it remains unclear "what that will mean for the ski industry – cornerstone of a tourism sector which accounts for some 15% of economic output – or overall life in Austria."

South Korean Authorities Ban Year-End Parties After Surge In New Coronavirus Infections.

Reuters (11/29, Kim) reports, "South Korean authorities announced a ban on year-end parties and some music lessons on Sunday and said public saunas and some cafes must also close after coronavirus infections surged at their fastest pace since the early days of the pandemic."

Physicians, Nurses In Madrid Protest Alleged Health System Cuts.

Reuters (11/29, Barbancho, Castellanos) reports that "doctors and nurses protested in Madrid on Sunday against cuts which they say have left them struggling to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic." For its part, "Madrid's conservative regional government has denied cutting health services."

Singaporean Baby Born With COVID-19 Antibodies.

Reuters (11/29) reports, "A Singaporean woman, who was infected with the novel coronavirus in March when she was pregnant, has given birth to a baby with antibodies against the virus, offering a new clue as to whether the infection can be transferred from mother to child." The baby was not born with an actual COVID-19 infection, but just "with the virus antibodies, the Straits Times newspaper reported on Sunday, citing the mother."

France's State Council Orders Government To Review Law Restricting Number Of People Allowed In Churches During Pandemic.

Reuters (11/29, Guillaume) reports, "France's State Council, the country's highest court, on Sunday ordered the government to review a law limiting the number of people in churches during religious services to 30." The Council had "said...that the measure was not proportionate to coronavirus infection risks."

Johnson Promises New Coronavirus Restrictions Will Be Put To Vote In January, Automatically End In February.

Bloomberg (11/29, Ross, 4.73M) reports, "U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson offered concessions in an effort to win over critics in his own Conservative Party who are threatening to oppose his plan for tougher pandemic rules in a crucial vote on Tuesday." Johnson "promised the new restrictions, which keep most of England under tight curbs when the national lockdown ends on Dec. 2, will put to a vote again in January and automatically come to an end in February." Deferring "to members of Parliament to back the laws, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab declined to rule out a third national lockdown early next year if the country fails to keep control over the coronavirus now." Raab "said the government was 'listening' to members of Parliament and would provide them with more information on the costs and benefits of the proposed plan before it's put to a vote."

COVID-19 Infections Down 30% In England During Month-Long Lockdown.

Reuters (11/29, James) reports, "COVID-19 infections have fallen by 30% during England's month-long national lockdown and the virus is now in retreat, a large-scale study of more than 100,000 volunteers showed on Monday."

Bloomberg (11/30, Morison, 4.73M) also reports.

Chinese State Media Push Narrative That Coronavirus Existed Abroad Before Being Discovered In Wuhan.

Reuters (11/26, Stanway) reported, "As global COVID-19 infections surge, China is pushing a narrative via state media that the virus existed abroad before it was discovered late last year in the central city of Wuhan, where it was traced to a seafood market." The media arms of the Chinese Communist Party "have cited the presence of the coronavirus on imported frozen food

packaging, as well as scientific papers claiming that the coronavirus was circulating in Europe earlier than previously believed, as evidence that China may not have been its origin."

Indonesia Secures Deals With At Least Four COVID-19 Vaccine Suppliers, Including Sinovac And AstraZeneca.

Bloomberg (11/26, 4.73M) reported that Indonesia's "government has orders with at least four vaccine suppliers, including Sinovac Biotech Ltd. and AstraZeneca Plc, whose shots are in late-stage trials" to provide its people vaccines against COVID-19. This "access ranks Indonesia second in Asia after China and on par with Japan and India for securing much-anticipated immunizations, according to data compiled by Bloomberg."

Hong Kong Faces New Surge In Coronavirus Cases Despite Appearing To Control Virus Previously.

The New York Times (11/27, Ives, May, Inoue, 18.61M) reported that "although still below its peak for the year, Hong Kong is facing a surge [in new coronavirus cases] on par with its summer wave, driven in large part by what experts call untraceable 'silent' transmissions." Recent setbacks in Hong Kong, which had appeared to have controlled the virus several times, "underscore the challenges that the world will continue to face until there is a widely available vaccine." In general, "As cases have soared back to alarming levels in recent weeks, South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong have had to quickly recalibrate their strategies."

Suicide Rates Among Young Women In Japan, South Korea Have Increased During Pandemic.

The Washington Post (11/28, Denyer, Kashiwagi, 14.2M) reported, "Suicide rates among young women have increased notably in Japan and South Korea, raising possible links to the prolonged coronavirus pandemic as it amplifies stress levels, worsens economic woes and aggravates feelings of loneliness and isolation." While "no comprehensive global studies are yet available on whether the pandemic has caused higher suicide numbers or how it may have affected different age groups and genders...Japan and South Korea are among the few countries to issue current data on suicides, with most countries taking a year or two to issue their numbers." Health "Experts worry that the emerging trends in the two countries could be an early warning for the rest of the world as the pandemic and lockdowns take a toll on mental health."

More People In Japan Die From Suicide Than From COVID-19 Year-To-Date.

CNN (11/28, 83.16M) reported, "In Japan, government statistics show suicide claimed more lives in October than COVID-19 has over the entire year to date." Specifically, "the monthly number of Japanese suicides rose to 2,153 in October, according to Japan's National Police Agency." By comparison, "as of Friday, Japan's total Covid-19 toll was 2,087, the health ministry said."

WHO Official Urges Countries Experiencing Lower COVID-19 Cases To Remain Vigilant.

The Hill (11/27, Coleman, 2.98M) reported that WHO's technical lead Maria Van Kerkhove "said Friday that countries that are experiencing decreasing COVID-19 numbers still need to be 'vigilant' in case of surges." The official "made the comment during a virtual briefing as European countries are seeing their new cases slow down after instituting stricter coronavirus restrictions, although hospitals and intensive care units remain full."

Trudeau Expects Over Half Of Canadians To Get COVID-19 Vaccine By Next September.

The AP (11/27, Gillies) reported, "Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Friday he expects more than half of Canadians to receive a COVID-19 vaccine by next September after he came under criticism for saying Canadians won't be among the first to get doses." He had "said earlier this week Canada will have to wait for a vaccine because the first ones are likely to be given to citizens of the countries they are made in," since, as Trudeau "noted, the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany have mass vaccine-production facilities but Canada does not." However, "opposition parties criticized Trudeau for not ensuring Canadians get priority access to vaccines."

Pandemic's Early Devastation On Wealthy Province Of Bergamo Still Remains A Mystery.

The New York Times (11/29, A1, 18.61M) reports that it remains a mystery how the pandemic was able to devastate the Italian region of "Bergamo, a wealthy, well-educated province of just more than a million, with top-level hospitals," and how it is "a blood stain that the government prefers to avoid as it points with pride to Italy's success in flattening the first wave of infections." However, "as the virus has exploded again throughout Italy, Bergamo's massive infection rate during the first wave, doctors say, has given it a measure of immunity." Bergamo's "hospitals, once an exporter of infection and the sick, are taking patients in from the surrounding areas."

FDA Issues Emergency Use Authorization For Kantaro Bioscience's COVID-19 Antibody Test.

CNN (11/25, Howard, 83.16M) reported that the FDA "issued an emergency use authorization for Kantaro Bioscience's Covid-19 antibody test kit, the group announced on Wednesday." The company's "newly authorized antibody test, called COVID-SeroKlir, identifies and measures precise levels of antibodies that are present in a person after COVID-19 recovery."

Also reporting were the New York Daily News (11/25, Braine, 2.52M) and the New York Post (11/25, Salo, 4.57M).

Quest Diagnostics, LabCorp COVID-19 Testing Taking Several Days To Complete.

USA Today (11/26, Alltucker, 10.31M) reported, "Amid a record demand for testing ahead of the Thanksgiving weekend, Quest Diagnostics said this week that it's taking up to three days to complete a test after receiving a sample." Additionally, "LabCorp, another large private lab company, said higher testing demand means it now takes up to two days to complete a test." These turnaround times do not "include the time it takes a person to schedule and get a test at a doctor's office, urgent care or other site." A number of "sites across the nation this week had long lines of people waiting to get tested."

Pandemic Reveals Shortcomings Of Diagnostic Tests' Limited Role In Addressing Disease.

The Washington Post (11/27, Ganguli, 14.2M) reported that "for many Americans, including physicians...the pandemic has forced difficult conversations about the limits of medical tests. It has also revealed the catastrophic harms of failing to recognize those limits." While "national coronavirus test shortages have emphasized testing's critical role in containing and mitigating the pandemic...these inconvenient truths remain: A test result is rarely a definitive answer, but instead a single clue at one point in time, to be appraised alongside other clues like symptoms and exposure to those with confirmed cases."

Fauci Predicts Current Holiday COVID-19 Restrictions Will Not Be Relaxed By Year's End.

Appearing on ABC's This Week (11/29, 1.96M), NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci discussed the surge in travel over the Thanksgiving holiday amid the pandemic. Fauci said, "Well, I mean, the travel that has been done has been done. Right now, as people go back, we want to urge them, if they've been in situations outside of the family setting in which they really don't know the level of exposure, to be really careful when you either return from the place that you went or other people come back into your house. That you've really got to understand the importance of trying to prevent further spread and further surge."

ABC News (11/29, Robinson, Kelsey, 2.97M) reports that during the interview on Sunday, Fauci also "said...that he does not foresee current holiday public health restrictions and recommendations being relaxed by the end of the year." Fauci explained, "When you have the kind of inflection that we have, it doesn't all of a sudden turn around like that." He added, "Clearly in the next few weeks, we're gonna have the same sort of thing." Despite the CDC's "encouragement that Americans postpone travel and stay home for Thanksgiving, the Transportation Security Administration screened more than 8 million people between Nov. 20 and Saturday."

The AP (11/29, Lush) reports, "Fauci addressed the school issue, saying that spread 'among children and from children is not really very big at all, not like one would have suspected. So let's try to get the kids back, but let's try to mitigate the things that maintain and just push the kind of community spread that we're trying to avoid,' he said."

CNBC (11/29, Newburger, Huddleston, 3.62M) reports Assistant Secretary for Health Adm. Brett Giroir "said on Sunday that he's worried about a surge in cases and hospitalizations from increased travel."

Fox News (11/29, Aitken, 27.59M) reports Fauci also said, "We say it, not being facetiously or having a soundbite or anything, but you know: close the bars, keep the schools open, is what we really say." Fauci and US Surgeon General Jerome Adams "were in lockstep during a series of appearances on Sunday morning talk shows, pushing the message that the asymptomatic spread is an unchecked element that is driving the severity of the pandemic."

Among other media outlets providing similar coverage are: The Hill (11/29, Coleman, 2.98M), HuffPost (11/29, Miller, 1.67M), the New York Post (11/29, Salo, 4.57M), Politico (11/29,

Bice, 4.29M), the Daily Caller (11/29, Corkery, 716K), and the Washington Examiner (11/29, Lee, 448K).

Fauci Warns Holiday Travel May Worsen Current COVID-19 Surge.

Appearing on NBC's Meet The Press (11/29, 103K), NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci discussed "the ongoing Covid-19 spike and how a vaccine will be distributed."

NBC News (11/29, Kamisar, 6.14M) reports Fauci "warned that the travel-heavy Thanksgiving holiday could make the current surge in Covid-19 cases even worse as the nation heads into December." During the interview, he "said that public health officials 'tried to get the word out for people, as difficult as it is, to really not have large gatherings' during the holiday." Fauci added, "What we expect, unfortunately, as we go for the next couple of weeks into December, is that we might see a surge superimposed on the surge we are already in." Despite the "mid-November warning from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention encouraging Americans not to travel during Thanksgiving, air travel broke pandemic records, with 6.8 million people traveling through airports in the seven days ahead of the holiday."

The Washington Post (11/29, Alemany, 14.2M) reports, "As the number of coronavirus-related deaths per day rose to its highest point since April, Fauci and others highlighted the importance of complying with mask mandates and physical distancing." US Surgeon General Jerome Adams said, "It's going to get worse over the next several weeks, but the actions that we take in the next several days will determine how bad it is or whether or not we continue to flatten our curve." The Post adds that "the number of coronavirus-related deaths are nearing record levels in the United States not seen since the spring. About 95,000 people are currently hospitalized with the disease, according to" Assistant Secretary for Health Adm. Brett Giroir.

The Hill (11/29, Coleman, 2.98M) reports Fauci said, "When I give that message, I don't want to frighten people, except to say it is not too late at all for us to do something about this, because as we travel back, to be careful when we go back to where we are, to just continue to do the things that we've been talking about." He "pointed to states that have instituted coronavirus restrictions involving mask wearing, social distancing and limits on gatherings, saying in those states, the COVID-19 cases curve starts to flatten."

The New York Daily News (11/29, Shahrigian, 2.52M) reports, "White House coronavirus response coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx echoed Fauci's predictions." Appearing on CBS' "Face the Nation," Birx said, "We're entering this post-Thanksgiving surge with three, four and 10 times as much disease across the country. ... That's what worries us the most … We are deeply worried about what could happen post-Thanksgiving."

Newsweek (11/29, Lemon, 1.53M) reports Fauci also "said that he doesn't have any 'power' to urge President Donald Trump to discourage holiday travel, warning of a new 'surge superimposed' on the current rapid increase in new infections."

The New York Post (11/29, Salo, 4.57M) reports that also during the interview on NBC, Fauci "said...that it will be 'months' before school-age children will be able to get the COVID-19 vaccine."

Axios (11/29, Rummler, 521K) also reports on the story.

Fauci Warns Thanksgiving May Mark Beginning Of "Dark Holiday Season" If COVID-19 Surge Continues.

USA Today (11/27, Rodriguez, 10.31M) reported NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "suggested Thanksgiving may be the beginning of a dark holiday season as the surge in coronavirus cases is likely to persist, or even get worse, through December, January and February." During an interview with USA Today, Fauci said, "If the surge takes a turn of continuing to go up and you have the sustained greater than 100,000 infections a day and 1,300 deaths per day and the count keeps going up and up ... I don't see it being any different during the Christmas and New Year's holidays than during Thanksgiving." Fauci "said the country is in a vulnerable position heading into the holiday season because infections are too high to control surges when they arise, as he is confident they will in the winter months."

The Hill (11/27, Polus, 2.98M) reported he "implored Americans to show their loved ones they care by 'keeping them safe' and avoiding family gatherings." Fauci added, "For my own family, I'm saying we had a really great Thanksgiving and Christmas last year. We're looking forward to a really great Thanksgiving and Christmas in 2021. Let's now make the best of the situation and show our love and affection for people by keeping them safe."

NPR (11/29, Schwartz, 3.12M) reports that in appearance on ABC's This Week on Sunday, Dr. Fauci said, "We may see a surge upon a surge," this holiday season, adding, "We don't want to frighten people, but that's just the reality. We said that these things would happen as we got into the cold weather and as we began traveling, and they've happened."

HuffPost (11/27, Blum, 1.67M) reported the CDC "has warned on its website that despite the loneliness and stress of the pandemic, holiday 'gatherings with family and friends who do not live with you can increase the chances of getting or spreading COVID-19 or the flu.'"

Newsweek (11/27, Fink, 1.53M) and the New York Post (11/27, Nelson, 4.57M) also reported on the story.

Fauci Encourages People Who Have Already Had The Coronavirus To Take Vaccine Anyway.

McClatchy (11/27, Wilner, 19K) reported NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "is advising Americans who have already had the coronavirus – or suspect that they've had it – to take the coming vaccines for it anyway." Fauci "told McClatchy that he doubts previously infected individuals will be restricted from accessing the vaccines, and that he has no reason to believe that taking the vaccine will be of harm to those who have already had COVID-19." Fauci said, "The final decision is going to be awaiting both FDA input, because we know that there were a certain percentage of the people who were in the original vaccine trial that had evidence they had been previously infected. So we need to see what the outcome of those individuals were."

Military Will Reportedly Play Less Public Role In COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Despite Trump's Comments.

The New York Times (11/26, Steinhauer, 18.61M) reported, "When President Trump talks about efforts to deliver the coronavirus vaccine to millions of Americans...he often says he is 'counting on the military' to get it done." However, vaccine distribution "will be left largely to their producers and commercial transportation companies." The Times added "the role of the military has been less public and more pervasive than this characterization suggests." HHS Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy Paul Mango said, "It is extremely unlikely that anyone from the government will touch a vaccine, whether that's loading a truck, unloading a truck, moving dry ice or actually injecting the vaccine before Americans getting it." The Times added the number of Defense Department employees involved in the effort "have led some current and former" CDC officials "to privately grumble that the military's role in Operation Warp Speed was too large for a task that is, at its core, a public health campaign."

Giroir Recommends Anyone Who Traveled Over Thanksgiving Get Tested For COVID-19.

CNN (11/29, Faulk, 83.16M) reports Assistant Secretary for Health Adm. Brett Giroir on Sunday "said...if you've done any traveling over the holidays, you should get tested." Giroir told CNN, "Just remember you've had an increased risk of being exposed, so you should decrease unnecessary activities for about a week, and if you can get tested in three or five days that's also a very good idea."

Forbes (11/29, McEvoy, 9.71M) reports Giroir added, "'A lot depends on this weekend'...deeming it possible that the U.S. could soon reach 4,000 deaths per day." NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci and US Surgeon General Jerome Adams "shared similarly dire predictions."

The Hill (11/29, Coleman, 2.98M) reports that furthermore, Giroir "promoted mask wearing and social distancing on Sunday, saying that 'testing alone will never solve this issue.'" He said, "Unless we can control the viral spread, by doing the things like wearing a mask, avoiding indoor crowded spaces, you cannot test your way out of this."

US Surgeon General Reveals Wife, Mother Have Been Hospitalized.

Fox News (11/27, Durschlag, 27.59M) reported that on Thanksgiving, US Surgeon General Jerome Adams on Twitter "disclosed that his wife, Lacey, and his mother were both recently hospitalized – and thanked everyone who 'kept a hospital bed open' for his loved ones by following coronavirus precautions." Adams tweeted, "My wife was just in the hospital due to cancer treatment complications. My mom was admitted last night with a hip fracture & possible stroke. Thanks to all who kept a hospital bed open for my loved ones by following #COVID19 precautions and getting your #flu shot. It matters."

The Hill (11/29, Budryk, 2.98M) reports Adams "said...that the coronavirus pandemic will 'get worse' in the weeks ahead, but noted that the first vaccines would likely be available to vulnerable populations by mid-December." He "noted that Pfizer is set to submit its emergency use authorization to the Food and Drug Administration on Dec. 10, with Moderna following suit on Dec. 18."

Politico (11/29, Semones, 4.29M) reports that appearing on "Fox News Sunday," Adams "cited his hospitalized mother as a reason Americans should start wearing masks to curb coronavirus case counts." Adams said, "Wearing a mask … will protect my mother and you."

White House Reportedly Weighing Lifting European Travel Ban.

Bloomberg (11/25, Levin, Bachman, 4.73M) reported, "Several federal agencies have recommended that the White House lift an entry ban on non-U.S. citizens arriving from Europe put in place to slow the spread of Covid-19." Bloomberg added, "The organizations, which participate in the White House Coronavirus Task Force, have signed off on lifting the restrictions, said two people who were briefed on the discussions." It is unclear whether White House officials, as well as President Trump, "will go along with lifting the ban or what the timing of a decision will be, said the people."

Reuters (11/25, Shepardson) reported the Administration "is not considering lifting separate entry bans on most non-U.S. citizens who have recently been in China or Iran, the officials said." The CDC on Saturday "issued new travel and testing recommendations for international air travelers recommending they 'get tested with a viral test 1-3 days before their flight to reduce spread during travel. Travelers should get tested 3-5 days after travel and stay home for 7 days.'"

CNN (11/25, Diamond, 83.16M) reported, "An administration official told CNN that the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has expressed some reservations about lifting the restrictions, but the agency is not expected to block the move."

Forbes (11/25, McEvoy, 9.71M) reported, "According to Reuters, administration officials argue that the restrictions should be lifted because many countries around the world aren't subject to the same entry ban, and the airline industry, which has seen international travel drop by 70%, is in desperate need of a life-saving jolt."

The New York Post (11/25, Golding, 4.57M) and The Hill (11/25, Jenkins, 2.98M) also reported on the story.

CDC Expected To Shorten Recommended COVID-19 Quarantine Periods.

The New York Times (11/29, Mandavilli, 18.61M) reports people with COVID-19 "are most infectious about two days before symptoms begin and for five days afterward, according to a new analysis of previous research." Meanwhile, the "few patients who are extremely ill or have impaired immune systems may expel – or 'shed' – the virus for as long as 20 days, other studies have suggested." This "accumulating data presents a quandary: Should public health officials shorten the recommended isolation time if it means more infected people will cooperate? Or should officials opt for longer periods in order to prevent transmission in virtually all cases, even if doing so takes a harsher toll on the economy?"

The Wall Street Journal (11/26, Subscription Publication, 7.57M) reported the CDC is finalizing its recommendations to shorten the self-quarantine period for someone who has been exposed to the coronavirus with the hopes the measure will encourage more Americans to comply, said a top agency official.

CNBC (11/25, Higgins-Dunn, 3.62M) reported the CDC is expected to shorten the recommended two-week quarantine period to between 7 to 10 days. CDC Director Robert Redfield "said in late October that those guidelines were made when diagnostic testing wasn't as readily available as it is today." A "shorter quarantine period could make it easier for people to follow the CDC's recommendations since most people were likely shortening the two-week period on their own...said" former FDA Commissioner Dr. Scott Gottlieb. Furthermore, NIAID Director Anthony Fauci "told ABC News' 'Good Morning America' on Wednesday that a two-week quarantine makes people reluctant to get tested for Covid-19 because a positive result could put them out of work."

The Washington Examiner (11/25, Brest, 448K) reported Assistant Secretary for Health Adm. Brett Giroir "said health officials were rethinking that recommendation, citing 'a preponderance of evidence that a shorter quarantine complemented by a test might be able to shorten that quarantine period.'"

Trump Says COVID-19 Vaccine Deliveries Will Begin As Early As This Week.

Fox News (11/26, Manfredi, 27.59M) reported, "President Trump said Thursday evening that coronavirus vaccine deliveries will begin as early as" this week. He also "noted that front-line workers, medical personnel and senior citizens would be the vaccine's first recipients." The comments "come ahead of a Dec. 10 meeting, where regulators at the Food and Drug Administration will review Pfizer's request for an emergency use authorization for its vaccine developed with BioNTech."

Top Health Officials Urge Americans Who Traveled Over Thanksgiving To Get Tested For COVID-19, But Differ On Quarantine Recommendations.

CNN (11/29, Duster, Thomas, 83.16M) reports that on Sunday, top US health officials "called on Americans to get tested for coronavirus after Thanksgiving travel as an important measure to help mitigate the virus' spread amid a surge in US cases." However, "when it came to whether individuals should quarantine or isolate, and for how long, responses from the nation's leading experts differed." CNN adds, "Assistant Secretary for Health Adm. Brett Giroir told CNN's Dana Bash on 'State of the Union' that it is 'not recommended to have a quarantine after travel unless you've had a direct exposure to a person with Covid for 15 minutes in close contact.'" However, NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "went a step further, encouraging individuals returning from travel to quarantine, if possible, to mitigate the spread." Additionally, "US Surgeon General Jerome Adams said those who gathered for Thanksgiving can still isolate and get tested."

CNN (11/30, 83.16M) also reports.

States Rush To Provide Pandemic Aid Amid Inaction By Washington.

The AP (11/28, Attanasio, Smyth) reported, "Faulting inaction in Washington, governors and state lawmakers are racing to get pandemic relief to small-business owners, the unemployed, renters and others whose livelihoods have been upended by the widening coronavirus outbreak." The AP added, "In some cases, elected officials are spending the last of a federal relief package passed in the spring as an end-of-year deadline approaches and the fall COVID-19 surge threatens their

economies anew." State leaders want President Trump "and Congress to extend the Dec. 30 deadline for spending virus relief money already allocated under the CARES Act...and to provide more federal funding to deal with the consequences of the latest surge."

Restaurants Push Back Against New Round Of COVID-19 Shutdown Orders.

The Wall Street Journal (11/29, Haddon, Wernau, Subscription Publication, 7.57M) reports some restaurants across the US are rejecting new shutdown orders implemented by cities and states in response to the spread of COVID-19. Restaurants as well as trade groups have filed lawsuits against the bans and have criticized policies targeting restaurants.

Rhode Island Prioritizes In-Person Instruction As Other Venues Shut Down.

The Washington Post (11/28, A1, Brulliard, Cha, Balingit, 14.2M) reported that beginning Monday, bars, "gyms, casinos, movie theaters and bowling alleys" must close for two weeks in Rhode Island, but most public schools will remain open because Gov. Gina Raimondo (D) "has made in-person instruction a priority even as coronavirus cases soar." The Post added, "Even as more data suggests schools do not appear to significantly fuel community spread, elected and school officials who favor open classrooms are contending with a spiraling virus that threatens to overwhelm the fragile staffing systems and contact tracing that keep pandemic-era schools running." CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield "recently called schools 'one of the safest places' for children."

Los Angeles Bans Public, Private Gatherings Of People From Different Households.

The New York Times (11/27, Hubler, Ismay, 18.61M) reported, "The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health on Friday called on residents to stay home as the virus continues its rapid surge, barring gatherings both in public at private homes if people are from different households." The order "allows for church services and protests, noting that both are constitutionally-protected rights," and "sets maximum occupancy rates for various businesses, including nonessential retail, libraries, and recreational activities, and leaves in place a countywide prohibition on in-person dining at restaurants and bars because patrons can't wear face masks while eating or drinking."

The Los Angeles Times (11/29, Lin, 4.64M) reports that "more than eight months into the pandemic," residents "are exhausted by the disruptions and becoming more vocal about the new rules despite swelling hospitalization numbers and forecasts of rising death tolls." The Times adds, "Health experts hope the public can make yet another sacrifice – and alter their holiday norms – for the greater good," however, "they also know it's getting harder as some grow skeptical of the rules and others simply need more human contact."

Reuters (11/28, Gorman) reported that under the order, "which runs through Dec. 20, residents are advised – but not required – to stay home as much as possible and to always wear face coverings when outside their homes and around others."

The Hill (11/27, Gstalter, 2.98M) reported that "all schools and day camps will remain open in adherence to reopening guidelines, according to the" order.

Forbes (11/28, Lee, 9.71M) also reported on the story.

Health Experts Weigh More Standardized State Mask Mandates To Include Higher-Quality Masks.

The AP (11/25, Hawryluk) reported that with states "requiring face coverings indoors to prevent the spread of COVID-19, gaiters and bandannas have become popular accessories," but research shows "those hipper face coverings are not as effective as surgical or cloth face masks." As COVID-19 infections, "hospitalizations and deaths surge upward heading into winter, many public health experts wonder whether it's time to move beyond the anything-goes approach toward more standardization and higher-quality masks." The CDC "now says that masks not only help prevent people from infecting others but help protect the wearers from infection as well," and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health researchers "have found most of the commercially produced cloth masks block 40% to 60% of droplets, approaching the effectiveness of surgical masks."

Rollout Of Illinois' COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Plan Still Faces Uncertainties.

The Chicago Tribune (11/27, Munks, 2.65M) reported, "Illinois' plan for distributing a COVID-19 vaccine when one becomes available puts front-line health care workers first in line to be inoculated, but shifting projections on how many initial doses the state is likely to receive, the various temperature storage requirements for different vaccines and changing federal recommendations make it uncertain exactly how that plan will roll out." Gov. J.B. Pritzker (D) "said this week the state will 'be ready to go, we believe, as soon as those vaccines hit the ground,'" however, "he made clear the many challenges of distributing a long-awaited vaccine."

Colorado Governor Extends Four COVID-19 Executive Orders.

The Denver Post (11/28, Svaldi, 720K) reported Colorado Gov. Jared Polis (D) "extended four executive orders Saturday, including one that provides a one-time state payment to workers who have collected unemployment benefits because of the pandemic." The Denver Post added, "Extensions were also granted on the state's initial disaster declaration, on an order tied to election-related work within the Secretary of State's office, and on the COVID-19 Dial Framework."

Las Vegas Mayor Criticizes Nevada Governor's Statewide COVID-19 "Pause" For Impact On City.

Forbes (11/27, 9.71M) contributor Jim Rossi wrote that as COVID-19 infections spike "in Nevada, Las Vegas has increased restrictions." Beginning "after midnight on Tuesday, November 24 and continuing at least three weeks, Gov. Steve Sisolak (D) ordered a statewide 'pause:' specific businesses and public events must reduce their capacity to 25%, spreading patrons out as much as possible." Las Vegas Mayor Carolyn Goodman criticized the restrictions, and called Sisolak "a dictator with whom we have complied every step of the way... We've had no choice."

Appeals Court Upholds Kentucky Governor's Order Halting In-Person Instruction At Religious-Based Schools.

The Louisville (KY) Courier-Journal (11/29, Aulbach, 368K) reports the US Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit "has upheld Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear's order halting in-person classes at public and private, religious-based schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic." The court "said Beshear's executive order halting in-person classes at K-12 schools – public and private – until early January can stand because it also applies to public schools and is a legal response to the COVID-19 emergency." Beshear "said the court 'recognized that we must all do our part over the next several weeks to slow this virus.'"

Low-Income Americans Turning To Credit Cards As Congress Fails To Pass New COVID-19 Relief Package, While The Wealthy Pay Off Debt.

Newsweek (11/26, Villarreal, 1.53M) reported, "Credit card data from the most recent months of the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic" indicate "lower-income Americans are using credit cards in the absence of stimulus relief while higher-earning Americans are largely paying off their credit card debt." This increased reliance "on credit cards has coincided with the failure of Congress to pass a federal stimulus bill that could include checks and enhanced unemployment benefits to the estimated 12.6 million Americans who remain out of work, according to Marketplace, a nonprofit economic news outlet."

CDC Model Suggests Actual Number Of Americans Infected With COVID-19 Could Be Near 100M.

NPR (11/26, Hamilton, 3.12M) reported, "The actual number of coronavirus infections in the U.S. reached nearly 53 million at the end of September and could be approaching 100 million now, according to a model developed by government researchers." This model, which was created by CDC scientists, "calculated that the true number of infections is about 8 times the reported number, which includes only the cases confirmed by a laboratory test."

US COVID-19 Case Rates Now Higher Than Those In Most European Countries, Data Indicate.

Contributor Alex Ledsom wrote in Forbes (11/26, 9.71M) that COVID-19 data "on both sides of the Atlantic are severe," however, "new figures show that the case rates of Covid-19 infections across many states are surging past most European countries." Ledsom said this is "important because of Thanksgiving – as people move around this holiday weekend, so too will the virus, so rates are expected to rise – and it's also indicative of the travel restrictions currently in place on both sides of the ocean."

Obama Says Some Lives Could Have Been Saved If Trump Had Not Disbanded Pandemic Response Unit Two Years Ago.

Newsweek (11/26, Walker, 1.53M) reported, "Former President Barack Obama said 'some lives' could have been saved in the COVID-19 pandemic if President Donald Trump had not disbanded the National Security Council's pandemic response unit in 2018." In addition, he "said the Trump administration had 'failed miserably' to do the basic tasks of looking after the American people and

ensuring they were safe as COVID-19 continues to spread across the nation over the Thanksgiving holidays." The article mentioned NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Commentary: Americans Should Be Aware Of Side Effects Of COVID-19 Vaccines.

Cheryl K. Chumley wrote in a Washington Times (11/26, 492K) op-ed that NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "may be pressing for 'as many people as possible' to get vaccinated – Bill Gates may be on a 'quest to vaccinate the world,' as The New York Times put it in a headline." However, "American citizens should know: The side effects from the coming COVID-19 vaccines are proving pretty freaking substantial."

Hospitals Face Staffing Shortages As COVID-19 Cases Rise.

NPR (11/30, 3.12M) reports "hospitals in much of the country are trying to cope with unprecedented numbers of COVID-19 patients." As of Sunday, NPR says, 93,238 people "were hospitalized, an alarming record that far exceeds the two previous peaks in April and July, of just under 60,000 inpatients." However, "beds and space aren't the main concern. It's the work force." Medical facilities "are worried that staffing levels won't be able to keep up with demand, as doctors, nurses and specialists such as respiratory therapists become exhausted or, worse, become infected or sick themselves." The usual "workaround for staffing shortages – hiring clinicians from out of town – isn't the solution anymore, even though it helped ease the strain early in the pandemic."

Crowds Protest Los Angeles County's Latest COVID-19 Restrictions.

Newsweek (11/30, Speare-Cole, 1.53M) reports, "Crowds gathered outside the home of the Los Angeles County's public health director on Sunday to protest against the latest round of Covid-19 restrictions taking effect this week." The protests come "after L.A. County officials outlined a new 'Safer at Home' order to come into force on Monday for three weeks amid a recent spike in coronavirus cases and deaths in the area." Meanwhile, "Governor Gavin Newsom recently announced a statewide curfew that forbids nonessential gatherings after receiving criticism over photos showing him dining out with a large group amid the COVID-19 pandemic."

German Economic Minister Warns People Must Do More To Reduce Social Contacts.

Reuters (11/30, Seythal, Escritt) reports German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier said Monday that Germans must do more to reduce their contacts to lower the number of COVID-19 infections, which is still very high in most German regions. He "added that pandemic relief aid for companies cannot be extended indefinitely." Altmaier told Deutschlandfunk radio, "People have to show discipline. ... We have to do more to reduce social contacts."

Opinion: COVID-19 Has Turned Americans Into "Potential Serial Killers."

Columnist Michael J. Stern writes in an opinion in USA Today (11/30, 10.31M) that "COVID-19 has turned every man, woman and child into a potential serial killer." He says that the disease "has turned the most necessary part of living – breathing – into a deadly event." Stern adds, "The

heartbreak wrought from a pandemic like COVID-19 is new for most Americans," but has caused "gay men of a certain age" to remember "when the AIDS virus emerged in the early 1980s in America."

Unaccompanied Alien Children

Justice Department Appeals Judge's Order Barring Expulsion Of Immigrant Children Who Crossed Border Alone.

The AP (11/25, Merchant) reported that the Justice Department last "Wednesday appealed a judge's order barring the expulsions of immigrant children who crossed the border alone, a policy enacted during the coronavirus pandemic to deny the children asylum protections."

Reuters (11/27, Wiessner) reported, "The Trump Administration has told a federal judge that his recent ruling barring U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) from expelling unaccompanied minors from the U.S. during the COVID-19 pandemic could overburden hospitals near the U.S.-Mexico border."

The Hill (11/26, 2.98M) also reported.

HHS in the News

CMS Proposes Lowering Fee For ACA Exchange Issuers.

Bloomberg Law (11/25, Johnson, Subscription Publication, 4K) reported that health insurance companies which "offer individual health plans on the Obamacare exchanges could see a reduction in the user fee associated with listing those plans if a proposed rule from the U.S. health agency becomes finalized."

Reuters (11/25, Nadeem) reported that on Wednesday, CMS "proposed to lower the fee for healthcare exchange issuers under the Affordable Care Act as part of the Trump administration's efforts to reduce healthcare insurance premiums." Under the plan, the fee would drop for HealthCare.gov "issuers from 3.0% to 2.25% of premium for the 2022 benefit year and for State-based Exchanges that use the federal platform to 1.75% of premium."

FierceHealthcare (11/25, King, 146K) quoted CMS Administrator Seema Verma as saying, "The actions we are taking today to reduce user fees will directly reduce premiums."

Healthcare Finance News (11/28, Morse, 93K) also covered the story.

HHS Seeking Information On Success Stories From Healthcare Providers Amid COVID-19 Pandemic.

HealthLeaders Media (11/24, Plunkett, 119K) reported, "Hundreds, if not thousands, of clinicians, facility engineers, healthcare systems and other care providers have been forced to get creative in order to deal with the rapidly evolving COVID-19 pandemic." HHS is interested in their "success stories." The department and CMS have "published a request for information on 'Effective and Innovative Approaches/Best Practices in Health Care in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.'" The department "seeks to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of changes adopted

by health care systems and health care providers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic." The piece mentioned the NIH.

GAO Audit Finds Gaps In Oversight Of Spending, Operations At IHS Facilities.

Federal News Network (11/25, Temin, 220) reported that the Indian Health Service "operates a nationwide network of health care facilities. Now an audit by the Government Accountability Office has found some gaps in the oversight of the spending and operations of IHS facilities." Jessica Farb, director in the healthcare team at the GAO, said "in 2017, GAO added federal management of programs that serve Indian tribes and their members, including the Indian Health Service, to our high risk list." This was partly because "we observed over a number of years across many reports that there was inadequate oversight that was hindering IHS' ability to ensure that Indian communities are getting timely access to quality health care. In addition, we've been focused on the potential for mismanagement at IHS given the decentralized nature of the health care system."

NIH Officials Describe Things They Are Thankful For This Year.

In a piece for Federal News Network (11/27, 220), Federal Drive host Tom Temin wrote, "I asked a few feds about what they are thankful for in this most remarkable of years." According to Temin, "National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins, perhaps not surprisingly, is thankful for progress in the battle against The Virus, 'thanks to the devoted and selfless efforts of thousands of scientists, who dropped everything to bring all of their talents and resources to take on the worst pandemic in 102 years.'" Temin said that the NIH's chief information officer, Andrea Norris, "had a similar thought," as she said, "I am thankful for my colleagues at the National Institutes of Health who are working tirelessly to accelerate the development of tests, treatments and vaccines for Covid-19 and by the many individuals who are providing front line assistance and medical care to the millions of people around the world who are affected by this global pandemic."

Cancer Screenings Delayed During Pandemic Could Lead To 10,000 Or More Excess Deaths, Experts Say.

The New York Times (11/30, Brody, 18.61M) reports, "In the early months of the pandemic, millions of people heeded warnings and fears about contracting the coronavirus and avoided, or couldn't even get, in-person medical visits and cancer screenings, allowing newly developed cancers to escape detection and perhaps progress unimpeded." NCI Director Dr. Norman E. Sharpless "warned in June that missed routine screenings could lead to 10,000 or more excess deaths from breast and colorectal cancers within the next decade." Meanwhile, "Dr. David E. Cohn, chief medical officer at The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center, said that in the early months of the pandemic 'we experienced a significant decline in new patients. ... This could result in a delayed diagnosis, more complex care and potentially a worse outcome.'"

Researchers Conduct Molecular Analysis Of Tumors From "Exceptional Responders."

Reuters Health (11/29, Carroll) reports, "A molecular analysis of tumors from patients who had exceptionally good responses to cancer treatments has helped researchers identify potential targets for patients who don't respond as well to standard therapies, researchers say." Specifically, "in a study of tumors from more than 100 exceptional responders, the study team identified genetic and microenvironment changes, many of which revealed plausible mechanisms for the response that could be exploited in the future, according to the report published in Cancer Cell." The director of the National Cancer Institute's Center for Cancer Genomics, Dr. Louis Staudt, said, "The major take home message from this study is that one can understand exceptional responses by molecular analysis of tumors."

Researchers Hope To Launch Study To Determine Whether Coronavirus Vaccines Can Stop Spread Of Virus.

Business Insider (11/27, Dunn, 3.67M) reported, "Leading vaccine researchers are hoping to launch an ambitious study as soon as possible to answer a crucial question about coronavirus vaccines: can they stop the spread of the novel virus." Virologist Dr. Larry Corey from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center told Business Insider, "We have no knowledge about whether it prevents you from actually acquiring the infection at all." Principal director at the National Cancer Institute and a member of the ACTIV working group Dr. Douglas Lowy said that "information on how the vaccines affect the spread of the virus would help us figure out what proportion of the population needs to be vaccinated in order to halt the coronavirus' spread."

FDA Recently Approved Treatment For Progeria.

Science News (11/25, Wilke, 342K) reported, "The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved a treatment that could give children with a rare genetic illness that causes premature aging more time to live." On November 20, the FDA announced that "the newly approved drug, called Zokinvy, is the first and only approved treatment for progeria and certain related syndromes." Tom Misteli, "a cell biologist at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, MD, who was not involved with work on the drug," said that it is a "testament to the power of basic research."

Opioid Crisis

Documents Reveal Consulting Firm's Role In Driving OxyContin Sales For Purdue Pharma.

The New York Times (11/27, Bogdanich, Forsythe, 18.61M) reported, "When Purdue Pharma agreed last month to plead guilty to criminal charges involving OxyContin, the Justice Department noted the role an unidentified consulting company had played in driving sales of the addictive painkiller even as public outrage grew over widespread overdoses." Last week, documents released "in a federal bankruptcy court in New York show that the adviser was McKinsey & Company, the world's most prestigious consulting firm." The documents "detail McKinsey's work with Purdue going back to 2008, the year after the drugmaker pleaded guilty to misleading regulators." The FDA "had previously told Purdue that OxyContin would face sales restrictions and that doctors prescribing it would require specialized training."

The Hill (11/28, Deese, 2.98M) reported, "One of the most prestigious consulting firms in the world, McKinsey & Company, advised Purdue Pharma to give pharmacy companies rebates for OxyContin overdoses in 2017, according to records released last week in a federal bankruptcy court in New York." The "documents submitted to the court last week revealed that McKinsey had allegedly given advice to the Sackler family on ways to boost sales of Oxycontin in the middle of the opioid epidemic, according to a report from The New York Times."

House Committee Asks Sackler Family To Testify At Hearing About Opioid Epidemic.

The Hill (11/25, Williams, 2.98M) reported, "The House Oversight and Reform Committee has invited Purdue Pharma's Sackler family to testify at a hearing next month on what the panel described as 'their role in fueling the opioid epidemic.'" This "invitation comes one day after the OxyContin manufacturer pleaded guilty to three federal criminal charges related to some of its sales and marketing practices related to the powerful painkiller."

STAT (11/25, Silverman, 24K) reported, "In a series of letters issued Wednesday, the House Committee on Oversight and Reform cited internal documents it released last month that helped to reinforce previous impressions – gleaned from years of litigation – about the way the drug maker was run by the secretive clan." According to STAT, "the Dec. 8 hearing is an outgrowth of its investigation."

Attorneys Allege State Attorneys General Holding Up Funds Set Aside For Victims From OxyContin Settlement.

The Hill (11/25, Bowden, 2.98M) reported, "Advocates for survivors of drug addiction say that state attorneys general who sued Purdue Pharmaceuticals over the OxyContin maker's role in the opioid crisis are holding up funds the company set aside for victims." Attorneys that represent "groups that provide services to opioid abuse victims told The Associated Press in an article published Wednesday that a disagreement between the attorneys general of various states and victims' advocacy groups over how to use a $200 million fund set aside to help those harmed by opioids."

Mental Illness

Biogen Makes Deal With Sage Therapeutics To Jointly Develop, Sell Treatments For Depression, Other Neurological Disorders.

Reuters (11/27, Roy) reported, "Biogen Inc will take a $650 million stake in Sage Therapeutics and make an upfront payment of $875 million to jointly develop and sell treatments for depression and other neurological disorders, the two companies said on Friday." According to the article, "the deal will give Biogen access to zuranolone, an oral therapy being developed for major depressive disorder (MDD) and postpartum depression, as well as SAGE-324, which is being developed for essential tremor and other neurological disorders."

STAT (11/27, Garde, 24K) also reported.

Prescription Drug Pricing

Trump Drug Price Proposal Would Depend On Providers Negotiating Discounts.

Modern Healthcare (11/25, Cohrs, Subscription Publication, 214K) reported that the Trump Administration's proposal "to tie Medicare payment for outpatient drugs to prices charged in foreign countries depends on providers negotiating drugmakers' prices down to meet reduced reimbursement levels." Although "the administration pitches the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation demonstration as an effort to lower drug prices, it's unclear whether or by how much drugmakers would actually lower the prices they charge healthcare providers. If they don't, providers have to choose whether to offer the drugs at a financial loss." The piece added, "Participation would be mandatory for healthcare providers with some exceptions, including cancer hospitals, children's hospitals, ambulatory surgical centers, critical-access hospitals, rural health clinics, federally qualified health centers, and Indian Health Service facilities."

Commentary: Lawmakers From Both Parties Must Continue Trump's Efforts To Lower Prescription Drug Prices.

Lynn Westmoreland, a Republican who served as a U.S. member of Congress for Georgia's 3rd District from 2007 to 2017 and the 8th District from 2005 to 2007, wrote in Newsweek (11/26, 1.53M) that earlier this month, President Trump, whom "most don't perceive to be the most bipartisan political figure in Washington, released an executive order that could end the lame-duck gridlock currently seen in the nation's capital." Trump's "executive order will reduce Medicare drug prices by preventing middlemen (namely, insurers and pharmacy benefit managers) from pocketing cost-savings rather than passing them along to seniors. The widely praised measure will save patients up to 30-percent on their prescription costs." Westmoreland said congressional lawmakers from both parties must continue this momentum.

Health Care & Insurance Reform

Analysis: ACA Seems Entrenched In US Healthcare System Amid Pandemic.

NBC News (11/28, McCausland, 6.14M) reported that in 2020, "Americans' access to health care took the spotlight like never before." During the presidential campaign, both candidates discussed "how best to provide Americans access to health care." At the heart of "both of their arguments remained a decade-old law: the Affordable Care Act – landmark health care legislation that showed its continued significance during this particularly difficult year." The article said about a decade after the ACA "was passed, the landmark health care legislation has survived numerous attacks under the Trump administration and appears to be deeply embedded in the nation's health care system. The effect it has had during this difficult year – whether in politics, policy or at the kitchen table – is hard to dispute."

ACA Enrollment Figures For This Year Similar To Last Year's Despite Pandemic, Data Indicate.

The Houston Chronicle (11/25, Wu, 730K) reported that healthcare experts "expected a surge in people buying health insurance plans through the Affordable Care Act exchange because of the

pandemic, but so far, enrollment numbers are about the same as last year, federal data" indicate. Some "1.6 million people nationally have enrolled in Affordable Care Act plans, similar to enrollment in the first half of November last year, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services." But the 2020 figures "don't include consumers from New Jersey or Pennsylvania, which left the federal exchange this year after setting up their own exchanges."

CMS Unveils Final Rule To Amend Risk Adjustment Data Validation.

HealthLeaders Media (11/25, Commins, 119K) reported that CMS recently "issued a final rule to amend the methodology for the Department of Health and Human Services' risk adjustment data validation (HHS-RADV) program." The agency "says the final rule 'will give states and insurers more stability and predictability, promote program integrity, and foster increased competition.'" CMS added, "These changes will also promote fairness by ensuring that insurers are not penalized in HHS-RADV when a difference in diagnosis for an enrollee has no effect on risk, as well as by ensuring that insurers that receive adjustments are receiving adjustments in proportion to the errors identified through HHS-RADV."

New Lawsuit Alleges Cigna Executives, Directors Tried To Poison Anthem's Acquisition Attempt.

The Indianapolis Star (11/25, Burris, 633K) reported, "A new lawsuit alleges that Cigna Corp.'s executives and directors actively worked to poison Anthem Inc.'s $48 billion bid in 2015 to take over the Connecticut-based company out of their own self-interest."

Human Services News

US Border Officials Shut Down South Texas Warehouse.

The Washington Post (11/25, Miroff, 14.2M) reported, "U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials have shut down the South Texas warehouse where chain-link enclosures were deplored as 'cages' during the Trump Administration's crackdown on [im]migrant families and children." The site "will undergo renovations until 2022, CBP officials said."

Many Children Reportedly Not Being Screened For Developmental Milestones In California.

Disability Scoop (11/30, Martínez, 1K) reports that "typically, developmental screenings are carried out at a doctor's office, with parents filling out standardized questionnaires that the pediatrician then reviews. The questionnaires help doctors assess whether children are hitting typical physical, behavioral, speech, cognitive and other milestones." However, "not all pediatricians use the formal screening tools, and many children fall through the cracks." Kids "can also miss out on screenings for a variety of reasons, including inadequate access to health care." Since "there is no uniform reporting system among California's patchwork of health care programs and services, it's difficult to say with certainty how many children aren't being screened. But statistics suggest the number is dire."

GAO Report Finds Schools Struggled To Address Needs Of Students With Disabilities After Schools Shuttered Amid Pandemic.

Disability Scoop (11/30, Heasley, 1K) reports, "Government investigators are offering up some of the first details about how schools fared in addressing the needs of students with disabilities when they shuttered at the start of the pandemic." A Government Accountability Office report "dives into how schools managed special education and services for English learners during the switch to distance learning in the spring of the 2019-2020 academic year, finding that by and large, they struggled." The large "range of needs among students with disabilities as well as the variety of services called for in their individualized education programs posed a significant challenge."

Commentary Calls For Federal Mandates To Help Congregate Care Settings During Pandemic.

In an opinion piece for USA Today (11/28, 10.31M), Robert Stack, founder, president and CEO of Community Options, wrote that "lost in the haze of the pandemic is the fact that no...federal requirements have been implemented to help...congregate care settings" other than nursing homes "such as large institutions for the developmentally disabled to improve their response to the pandemic." Stack said this is true because "no consistent or official data collection program exists for most institutions outside of nursing homes." Stack asserted, "We need to act now. That means immediate mandates for such facilities to track and provide authorities with accurate infection and mortality data, and immediate action to prevent further deaths of people in large, congregate care facilities. It also means an accelerated timetable for the depopulation of these outdated, human warehouses."

Food & Import Safety

Fresh Attitude Baby Spinach Recalled Over Salmonella Concerns.

The Miami Herald (11/29, Neal, 1.09M) reports, "The possibility of salmonella contamination caused the recall of Fresh Attitude Baby Spinach in six states and Eastern Canada Thursday and Friday." The impacted "spinach went to New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and Canadian provinces Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island."

Organic Basil Recalled After Cyclospora Found By Florida Department Of Agriculture.

The Miami Herald (11/25, 1.09M) reported, "Cyclospora found by the Florida Department of Agriculture ignited a run of organic basil recalls that hit the store brands of some of the nation's biggest grocery sellers, an FDA-posted recall notice announced Tuesday night."

Target-Branded Nut Bars Recalled For Allergen Labeling Problem.

The Miami Herald (11/26, 1.09M) reported, "One lot of Target's Good & Gather Banana & Chocolate Chip Date Nut Bars has been recalled after a packaging mistake created a potential food allergy problem." According to the manufacturer Riverside Natural Foods in the FDA's notice, "the

almond-containing product was distributed in packaging that did not reveal the presence of almonds."

Medicare

Data Indicate Little Change In Regional Medicare Spending Differences In Last Decade.

Modern Healthcare (11/28, Bannow, Subscription Publication, 214K) reported that about 10 years "ago, celebrated surgeon and writer Dr. Atul Gawande penned a New Yorker article that called out certain areas of the country for their high Medicare spending." In spite of "the public lashing some regions endured, the most recent data from the Dartmouth Atlas show little has changed since then with respect to the communities atop the Medicare spending tower and those at the bottom. Miami was highest among hospital referral regions in the latest price-adjusted data, from 2017, followed by two smaller cities that were also near the top in 2010: Munster, Ind., and Monroe, La. Grand Junction, Colo., Anchorage, Alaska, and Honolulu had among the lowest spending in both years."

Medicaid & CHIP

States Mulling How To Reduce Costs As Medicaid Enrollment Increases Amid Pandemic.

The Wall Street Journal (11/27, Armour, Subscription Publication, 7.57M) reported state leaders find themselves mulling potential reductions to Medicaid services to compensate for rising enrollment and expenses stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commentary Criticizes Medicaid For Allowing Improper Payments To Exceed $100B Annually.

Brian Blase, a former special assistant to President Trump at the National Economic Council from 2017 to 2019, wrote in the New York Post (11/28, 4.57M) that "Medicaid is meant to cover health care and long-term care for lower-income Americans," however, "a new report reveals the government – both in Washington and in state capitols across the country – is failing to ensure that only people who are eligible for Medicaid are enrolling." Blase said the US "government's improper Medicaid payments now exceed $100 billion a year," which "means that more than one-in-four dollars flowing out of Medicaid – our nation's third-largest government program – do not meet program rules. This staggering failure doesn't just reduce health-care access for the truly eligible, it also harms taxpayers who fund it."

Editorial Says Ohio Medicaid, Other Programs Must Be Improved.

The Columbus (OH) Dispatch (11/27, 367K) wrote in an editorial that "someone needs to read the fine print on contracts that the state of Ohio makes with vendors for computers to manage systems for assisting low-income families and individuals." The fine print "must say somewhere that any electronic means for extending health care through Medicaid, food aid through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or cash aid through Temporary Assistance to Needy Families must be clunky and unworkable, because that's what the state has received, year after

year for decades." The paper said these programs must be improved so that they serve customers better, especially amid the pandemic.

Health & Medical News

Moderate To Vigorous Exercise A Few Times A Week May Help People With Mild Cognitive Impairment Slow Progression To Alzheimer's Or Similar Dementia, Research Suggests.

The Washington Post (11/27, 14.2M) reported, "People with mild cognitive impairment (MCI) who engage in as little as 10 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise a few times a week may be helping to slow the progression to Alzheimer's or similar dementia, new research suggests." The findings were published in Alzheimer's Research and Therapy.

Abortion Rate In US Increased Slightly From 2017 To 2018, CDC Data Show.

The Hill (11/25, Hellmann, 2.98M) reported, "The abortion rate in the U.S. ticked up slightly from 2017 to 2018, according to data reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) by 47 states and New York City."

NYTimes Analysis Highlights How Substance Abuse Treatment Programs Have Moved Online Due To Coronavirus.

A New York Times (11/28, Richtel, 18.61M) analysis discussed how substance abuse treatment programs transitioned to online formats following the coronavirus pandemic's onset. The Times says, "Though online rehab rose as an emergency stopgap measure, people in the field say it is likely to become a permanent part of the way substance abuse is treated. Being able to find a meeting to log into 24/7 has welcome advantages for people who lack transportation, are ill, juggling parenting or work challenges that make an in-person meeting tough on a given day and may help keep them more seamlessly connected to a support network."

Parents Less Likely To Know When Children Use E-Cigarettes, Study Suggests.

The Washington Post (11/27, Blakemore, 14.2M) reported, "Nearly 1 in 3 middle- and high-schoolers say they've tried a tobacco product." In addition, "when youths opt for e-cigarettes, a new study suggests, parents are much less likely to know." According to the study, "about half as many parents whose kids only vaped suspected or knew that they did, compared with 69 percent of kids who smoked traditional cigarettes." The findings were published in Pediatrics.

Indiana Lawmakers Reportedly Willing To Increase Cigarette Tax, But Say Measure Must Specify How Revenue Will Improve Public Health.

The AP (11/26) reported, "Indiana legislative leaders are willing to increase the state's cigarette tax but say any measure must include specifics on how the new revenue will be used to improve public health." The state's "21.8% adult smoking rate is one of the highest in the nation, The (Northwest Indiana) Times reported," and "the Indiana Chamber of Commerce has recommended raising the cigarette tax by $2 per pack to $3."

Teladoc Looking To Play Bigger Role In Helping People Manage Chronic Diseases.

The AP (11/29, Murphy) reported, "Fresh off a big acquisition and riding a wave of customer growth, Teladoc Health is ready to do more for patients." Teladoc "CEO Jason Gorevic said the telemedicine provider can play a big role in helping people manage high blood pressure, diabetes or other chronic conditions." Additionally, "he wants customers to think well beyond primary care when they consider telemedicine, which involves care delivered remotely, often with a live video connection through smartphones or tablets."

Global Health

Malaria Deaths Resulting From Pandemic Disruptions To Heath Services Will Far Exceed COVID-19 Deaths In Sub-Saharan Africa, WHO Warns.

Reuters (11/29, Kelland) reports, "Deaths from malaria due to disruptions during the coronavirus pandemic to services designed to tackle the mosquito-borne disease will far exceed those killed by COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa, the World Health Organization warned on Monday."

WHO Releases New Physical Activity Guidelines Recommending Adults Get At Least 150 Minutes Of Moderate-To-Vigorous Exercise Each Week.

CNN (11/25, Rogers, Howard, 83.16M) reported that the World Health Organization "released new physical activity guidelines recommending that adults get at least 150 minutes...of moderate to vigorous physical activity weekly." Previously, WHO "recommended that adults ages 18 to 64 do either at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise or minimum 75 minutes of vigorous exercise each week, and those previous recommendations were made for healthy adults." WHO's "new recommendations now include people living with chronic conditions or a disability."

Reuters (11/25, Nebehay), the AP (11/26, Keaten), and The Hill (11/26, 2.98M) also reported.

Teva, Cephalon Fined By EU Over Alleged Collusion To Keep Cheaper Modafinil Off Market.

The AP (11/26) reported that the EU has levied fines against Teva Pharmaceutical and Cephalon "for colluding to keep a cheap alternative to a sleep disorder medicine off the market for their profit and at the expense of patients." Antitrust commissioner for the EU, Margrethe Vestager, "said that" the firms "must pay 60.5 million euros ($72 million) for agreeing between themselves to delay for years the launch of Teva's cheaper version of Cephalon's blockbuster" Provigil (modafinil). Teva received "beneficial side deals and some payments" as a part of the arrangement. Teva will appeal the decision.

Reuters (11/26, Blenkinsop) reported, "Cephalon's main patents for Europe had expired by 2005 and the illegal agreement lasted to 2011, when Teva acquired Cephalon, the Commission said."

National News

In First Post-Election TV Interview, Trump Continues To Allege Voter Fraud.

In his first television interview since the election, President Trump called Fox News' Sunday Morning Futures (11/29) to discuss the results of the 2020 election. Typical of the tone of the coverage, the Washington Post (11/29, Sonmez, 14.2M) reports the President "suggested Sunday that he will never accept his loss to Democrat Joe Biden and continued to fling baseless accusations of election fraud." He told host Maria Bartiromo, "My mind will not change in six months." The President added, "There was tremendous cheating here."

The Hill (11/29, Samuels, 2.98M) says that Trump "spent most of the 45-minute phone call with Bartiromo levying unproven and baseless allegations that letter carriers, Dominion Voting Systems, Republican officials and mail-in ballots were all to blame for his defeat to Biden nearly a month ago," even though his lawsuits continue to "fall flat and he fails to produce evidence of widespread fraud in the contest...Biden won." Bloomberg (11/29, Wingrove, 4.73M) similarly says that Trump on Sunday "rehashed a litany of largely unfounded allegations about the Nov. 3 election without offering new evidence for his claim that millions of votes across several battleground states were fraudulent." An AP (11/29, Yen, Colvin) "fact check" also highlights that he "failed to cite specific evidence" of voter fraud "when repeatedly asked to do so."

The Washington Times (11/29, Swoyer, 492K) reports the President "said voting machine glitches took tens of thousands of votes for him and switched them to" Biden, and he "said the massive dumps of mail-in votes after Election Day in critical battleground states like Michigan and Pennsylvania took the win away from him." In addition, the Wall Street Journal (11/29, Leary, Subscription Publication, 7.57M) reports Trump described the Justice Department and Federal Bureau of Investigation as "missing in action" for not pursuing his voter fraud claims, while the New York Times (11/29, Fuchs, 18.61M) reports he suggested they "might be 'involved' in what he again groundlessly called a fraudulent presidential election, hinting that the nation's law enforcement agencies were biased against his fading efforts to remain in office."

However, Reuters (11/29, So, Satter) reports the President "questioned on Sunday whether the Supreme Court would ever hear a case airing his unproven allegations of widespread election fraud." CNBC (11/29, Higgins, 3.62M) reports Trump said, "The problem is, it's hard to get into the Supreme Court." He added, "I've got the best Supreme Court advocates, lawyers, that want to argue the case, if it gets there. They said, 'It's very hard to get a case up there.'" He continued, "Can you imagine, Donald Trump, president of the United States, files a case, and I probably can't get a case." On NBC Nightly News (11/29, story 4, 1:10, Snow, 3.52M), Kelly O'Donnell said, "Another hurdle [is] the President's understanding of how election litigation works. He told advisers he wanted to personally file one catch-all election lawsuit."

The Hill (11/29, Samuels, 2.98M) also reports the President "said he regretted endorsing Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp (R), taking a swipe at the top Republicans in the state ahead of two critical Senate runoff elections." According to the AP (11/29, Dil), "Trump has seethed over losing the southern state, which hadn't voted for a Democrat for president in nearly 30 years."

On the CBS Weekend News (11/29, story 4, 1:40, Yuccas, 10.48M), Ben Tracey reported Trump is "claiming that foreign leaders are calling him and telling him this is the most messed up

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election they have ever seen. But the White House has not released a readout of any call with any foreign leader since the election, and almost every US ally has called Joe Biden to congratulate him."

Although the Washington Post (11/29, Barr, 14.2M) reports Bartiromo, "one of the biggest backers of Trump's presidency within the Fox News Media corporate ecosystem," secured a "major exclusive" by landing the interview with the President over "superfans on upstart networks like Newsmax and One America News, which are trying to eat into Fox's dominance in conservative media – with the help of Trump's cheerleading on Twitter," her "few" questions "were not hard-hitting," which USA Today (11/29, Yasharoff, 10.31M) reports prompted "criticism [of Bartiromo] for not challenging the president on his unsubstantiated claims."

Seung Min Kim of the Washington Post said on CNN's Inside Politics (11/29, 1.49M), "I think the closest you may see to any sort of a concession speech is perhaps his upcoming rally this weekend in Georgia. Again, he's not going to admit defeat. He's made it clear he does not believe he lost, even though he did, and I think what we can expect to see is just kind of a long laundry list of his accomplishments while in office to try to show his supporters that he was the actual winner when he wasn't."

Clarence Page of the Chicago Tribune said on Fox News' MediaBuzz (11/29, 536K) that "there have been...some 30 cases thrown out already. The only case that has any sticking power was one in regard to how far back the judges were from the ballots, in terms of how many feet. That's not massive voting fraud and that's what the President is alleging constantly, that there's this massive fraud. What he is showing is that he definitely has a sense of entitlement to an election victory here even if the votes don't back him up and his supporters appreciate hearing that. It bolsters the idea that their guy just couldn't lose unless it was stolen from him. How that translates into his political future, we will see."

In his Washington Post (11/28, 14.2M) column, Fred Hiatt argues that if "Trump's coup attempt has failed, it is because his defeat was so decisive – and because those state and local officials had the integrity and courage to resist Trump's pressure. But here's the essential point: Almost no Republicans on the national stage had the integrity or courage to offer backup for these local officials." Hiatt adds, "Almost none of them gave the public any reason to hope that if Trump's effort to steal the election state by state had gained traction, they would have stood against it."

However, Ben Domenech of The Federalist said on Fox News' MediaBuzz (11/29, 536K) the President is "shifting from a largely legal strategy to a media strategy. The fact that [Sunday] morning he went on with Maria [Bartiromo] and made as strong of a case as he could for his perspective on this. ... I think that you're just going to be in a situation where again and again you are going to have these conflicts between the press and the President until he actually leaves office, because they've set up this whole scenario of him getting like bunkered in or something like that in the White House in ways that I think were never going to happen, but in ways that they have really played up over the past several months. As the President acknowledged, he's going to leave if the Electoral College goes as we all expect it to, and I anticipate that that's going to happen. But it's not going to stop his criticism of the way this election played out."

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Trump Plans Lawsuit After Wisconsin Recounts Add To Biden's Margin Of Victory. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (11/29, Marley, 632K) reports a $3 million recount of the vote in Milwaukee County and Dane County, Wisconsin, paid for by the Trump campaign, "boosted Democrat Joe Biden's victory by 87 votes Sunday as...Trump said he was preparing a lawsuit to overturn the results."

The New York Times (11/29, Fuchs, 18.61M) reports that in Milwaukee County, Biden "received 317,527 votes," while Trump "received 134,482, according to county results. Both totals increased slightly compared with an earlier count, and Mr. Biden gained 132 votes." The Times adds Dane County "found that 260,094 votes were cast for Mr. Biden, while 78,754 were cast for Mr. Trump. Compared with earlier results, the final tally included 91 fewer ballots for Mr. Biden and 46 fewer for Mr. Trump – a net gain of 45 for Mr. Trump." The Washington Post (11/29, Helderman, 14.2M) reports on its front page that the final results of the recount "reconfirmed [that] Biden beat...Trump in the key swing state by more than 20,000 votes, the latest example of the president's flailing efforts to undo the election results."

Bloomberg (11/29, Albright, House, 4.73M) reports Dane County Clerk Scott McDonell "said on Sunday that the recount was a 'success' and should provide reassurance that the election was run properly." McDonell added, "What this recount showed was that there was absolutely no evidence of voter fraud in this election." In a statement, Danielle Melfi, Wisconsin State Director for the Biden campaign, also told the AP (11/29) that the recount "only served to reaffirm...Biden's victory in Wisconsin." However, Jenna Ellis, a lawyer for Trump's campaign, "said in a statement that the Wisconsin recounts have 'revealed serious issues' about whether the ballots were legal, but she offered no specific details to validate her claim."

Reuters (11/29, Renshaw), Politico (11/29, Bice, 4.29M), The Hill (11/29, Budryk, 2.98M), and the Washington Times (11/29, Swoyer, 492K), among other outlets, provide similar coverage of the recounts.

Pennsylvania Lt. Gov. Says SCOTUS Would Defeat Trump Appeal. The Hill (11/29, Mastrangelo, 2.98M) reports Pennsylvania Lt. Gov. John Fetterman (D) in a CNN interview "said late Saturday that he is hopeful...Trump's campaign appeals lawsuits thrown out by judges in the state to the U.S. Supreme Court so the issue can be put to rest on a national stage." Fetterman asserted that if the Supreme Court hears the case, Trump's campaign is "gonna get their clock cleaned there the way they did here in Pennsylvania."

On ABC World News Tonight (11/29, story 4, 2:05, Llamas, 6.37M), White House Correspondent Rachel Scott stated that even a judge that Trump "appointed himself in Pennsylvania ripping into the President's legal team's arguments. Stephanos Bibas writing, 'Calling an election unfair does not make it so. Charges require specific allegations and then proof. We have neither here.' And the state supreme court slamming the door on a Republican effort to throw out all mail-in votes. Unanimously rejecting the case."

Hutchinson: "Courts Have Not Seen Any Evidence" Of "Extensive" Voter Fraud That Could Challenge Election Result. Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson (R), on Fox News Sunday (11/29, 1.27M), said, "Most importantly the courts have not seen any evidence of such extensive fraud that they have to change the result. Scores of courts have looked at that and so that's why the

General Service Administration recognized Vice President Biden as President-elect. He is President-elect. We need to work that transition. I applaud President Trump for initiating that transition and making sure that is happening." However, Hutchinson added, "When you look at the elections, it would be good after the fact that we have a bipartisan review for best practices, because this is going to come up again as to how to handle absentee votes, what's the best way to protect the integrity of those votes to give people confidence."

Sen. Blunt Says He Expects Biden Will Be Inaugurated On Jan. 20. Politico (11/29, Semones, 4.29M) reports Sen. Roy Blunt (R-MO) "repeatedly declined to refer to Joe Biden as the 'president-elect' on Sunday, despite acknowledgments from some fellow Senate Republican colleagues who have recognized the former vice president's electoral win."

However, Blunt said on CNN's State Of The Union (11/29, 1.8M), "We are certainly moving forward as if [Biden will be inaugurated] on January the 20th." He added, "The rules committee I chaired issued the regulations a few days ago so that Senate employees who wanted to be a part of what is called the landing teams and the various agencies have a legal structure now to where they can go and be at those agencies between now and January the 20th, if the Biden organization wants them to do that. But the President wants to see this process play out." According to Blunt, "The President-elect technically has to be elected President by the electors and that happens in the middle of December and January 6th, I'm one of the four members of the Congress that participates in the joint session that decides that those electoral votes are fully accepted and that is when this process is over: when those votes are accepted and counted." On CNN's State Of The Union (11/29, 1.8M), he also discussed potential adjustments to the inauguration because of the coronavirus.

In his Washington Post (11/29, 14.2M) column, James Downie criticizes Blunt's response and argues that the Republican Party of 2020 "may look different from its earlier incarnations, but the fundamentals remain the same: The party is fearful of change, partial to fearmongering, hostile to free elections and running short on competence. Don't be surprised if the GOP of 2030 looks a lot like that, too."

Krebs Says He Is Confident In Security Of 2020 Election. Former CISA director Chris Krebs told CBS' 60 Minutes (11/29, 10.48M), "I have confidence in the security of this election, because I know the work that we've done for four years in support of our state and local partners. I know the work the intelligence community has done, the Department of Defense has done, that the FBI has done, and my team has done. I know that these systems are more secure. I know based on what we have seen that any attacks on the election were not successful." Asked if he stands by his statement that the election was "the most secure in American history," Krebs said, "Yeah, I stand by that." The rest of the interview can be seen here.

Subsequently, The Hill (11/29, Bowden, 2.98M) reports the President "ripped CBS News's '60 Minutes' on Sunday after an interview with his former cybersecurity chief was broadcast on the program." According to The Hill, "Trump accused producers of the program of not contacting the White House for comment about" Krebs' remarks.

Mullen Criticizes Administration For Delaying Transition Process. The Washington Times (11/29, Meier, 492K) reports ret. Navy Adm. Michael Mullen, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

in an NBC "Meet the Press" interview on Sunday "predicted that the transition is going to be 'particularly difficult' as it relates to national security." The Hill (11/29, Choi, 2.98M) reports Mullen "said...it was best to 'give any president as many options and as much space as possible,' when speaking on the presidential transition process which had been delayed by the Trump administration." He added, "It appears that the current administration is trying to lock in as many options as, as many issues as possible to make it much more difficult for President-elect Biden to govern. And actually, historically, that has just never been the case."

Newsmax Sees Opportunity In Backing Trump's Efforts To Challenge Election. Under the headline "The King Of Trump TV Thinks You're Dumb Enough To Buy It," the New York Times (11/29, Smith, 18.61M) profiles Newsmax CEO Chris Ruddy, who "has found a business opportunity in feeding Trump supporters the fantasy that the president could still win the election." According to the Times, Ruddy "has capitalized on the anger of Mr. Trump's supporters at Fox News for delivering the unwelcome news, first in Arizona and then nationally, that Mr. Trump had lost his re-election campaign. On Newsmax, however, the fight is still on, the imaginary election-altering Kraken is yet to be released, Mr. Trump is striving valiantly for four more years and the ratings are incredible." However, the Times says Ruddy "is not the sort of true-believing ideologue his viewers may imagine in the foxhole alongside them."

WSJournal Calls For Ballot Reform In Aftermath Of 2020 Election. In an editorial, the Wall Street Journal (11/29, Subscription Publication, 7.57M) criticizes a Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruling regarding ballots that are improperly or insufficiently filled out and calls on lawmakers in the state and across the country to address how to handle such faulty ballots ahead of the next election.

Trump To Campaign For Perdue, Loeffler In Georgia.

The Washington Times (11/29, Swoyer, 492K) reports President Trump will campaign in Georgia ahead of the January run-off elections for US Senate. Trump "is expected to campaign for Sens. David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler, two Republicans hoping to keep their seats and retain control of the Senate."

Ossoff: Perdue "Needs To Come Out Of Hiding" About His Stock Sales. Georgia Senate candidate Jon Ossoff (D) was asked on CNN's State Of The Union (11/29, 2.07M) about the Justice Department closing its investigation into Sen. David Perdue's (R) stock sales. Ossoff said, "I think that the standard of conduct for a sitting US Senator needs to be higher than that he wasn't indicted for egregiously unethical misconduct. Senator Perdue was buying up shares in manufacturers of vaccines and medical equipment and dumping his casino shares while he had access to classified briefings on COVID-19 and was telling the rest of us this was no deadlier than the flu. All year, Sen. Perdue has been lying to the public and press insisting he had no control over his stock trades. But this new reporting reveals that the FBI investigation, the banking records reveal he was, in fact, personally directing his own stock trades. So now Senator Perdue needs to come out of hiding."

Loeffler, Collins Stress Importance Of Voter Turnout. Loeffler said on Fox News' Sunday Morning Futures (11/29), "We have a very strong field organization. We are going to monitor and verify all the signatures. We are going to be right there and make sure that Georgians can trust this process

because we have to have integrity in our elections. Given everything that's on the line January 5th, we're making sure that Georgians are fired up to turn out to vote because if we don't vote, we won't win. If we vote, we will win this election and keep America prosperous and secure for generations to come."

The Hill (11/29, Axelrod, 2.98M) reports Rep. Doug Collins (R-GA) "urged Republican voters to keep track of local election laws and turn out in two Senate runoffs in January amid concerns that some in the GOP will boycott the contests." On John Catsimatidis's radio show on WABC 770, Collins "said it was imperative for voters to make sure that their votes would be tallied in the two races." Collins said, "Well I think the biggest thing in all of this is to focus on being involved in the election process. This election process showed that people had to be on guard, not just in the election time, but also in all times. If we see changes to how we administer absentee ballots, how we see changes administered to our voter rolls, people have to take advantage of that and watch that."

Faith-Based Groups Organizing On Both Sides Of Georgia Senate Runoffs. The AP (11/29, Schor, Nadler) says "faith-based organizing is heating up" in the Georgia runoffs as "conservative Christians are rallying behind" Loeffler and Perdue, "while Black churches and liberal-leaning Jewish groups are backing Democratic challengers Rev. Raphael Warnock" and Ossoff.

Biden Announces All-Female Senior Communications Team.

On NBC Nightly News (11/29, story 3, 1:00, Snow, 3.52M), Kelly O'Donnell reported Joe Biden's transition team on Sunday "rolled out a big staff announcement. Women to fill all the top seven communications roles, including former Obama aide Jen Psaki, named White House press secretary, and deputy campaign manager Kate Bedingfield as communications director." The AP (11/29, Jaffe) highlights that four of the seven top White House communications roles "will be filled by women of color, and it's the first time the entire senior White House communications team will be entirely female."

Reuters (11/29, Volcovici) reports Biden said, "I am proud to announce today the first senior White House communications team comprised entirely of women. These qualified, experienced communicators bring diverse perspectives to their work and a shared commitment to building this country back better." A front-page Washington Post (11/29, A1, Linskey, 14.2M) article says that Biden's selections "show the president-elect's determination to bring in a more diverse leadership team than what Washington has seen in the past," and they "reflect the reality that women powered Biden's victory via, among other contributions, record activism and political donations."

The Wall Street Journal (11/29, Parti, Subscription Publication, 7.57M), Bloomberg (11/29, Epstein, 4.73M), USA Today (11/29, Garrison, Jansen, 10.31M), and The Hill (11/29, Coleman, 2.98M), among other outlets, report similarly.

Biden To Announce Economic Advisers This Week.

The New York Times (11/29, Rappeport, Tankersley, 18.61M) reports Joe Biden "is expected to name top members of his economic team this week, including Cecilia Rouse, a Princeton labor economist, to run the Council of Economic Advisers, and Neera Tanden, the chief executive of the

Center for American Progress, to lead the Office of Management and Budget, according to people familiar with the matter." The Times adds the announcement, which "will include Mr. Biden's decision to name Janet L. Yellen, the former Federal Reserve chair, as Treasury secretary – would potentially culminate in several women in top economic roles, including the first Black woman to lead the Council of Economic Advisers and the first Indian-American to lead the Office of Management and Budget. All three jobs require Senate confirmation." In a front-page exclusive, the Wall Street Journal (11/29, A1, Thomas, Davidson, Subscription Publication, 7.57M) says Biden and Sen. Kamala Harris (D-CA) are expected to formally make the announcement on Tuesday.

Bloomberg (11/29, Epstein, Mohsin, 4.73M) says that in addition to promoting "ethnic and gender diversity, the choices show Biden turning to experienced Washington hands as he begins building his economic team." Politico (11/29, Cassella, White, Pager, 4.29M) reports Biden "has been under rising pressure to select more people of color for senior jobs in his administration." Reuters (11/29, Marte, Timmons) and The Hill (11/29, Choi, 2.98M), among other outlets, report similarly.

Biden Twists Ankle, Suffers Hairline Fracture While Playing With Dog.

The Washington Post (11/29, Wang, 14.2M) reports Joe Biden "slipped Saturday while playing with his dog Major, one of his two German shepherds, his office said," and subsequently "visited Delaware Orthopaedic Specialists in Newark, Del., about a half-hour from his home near Wilmington." The Post adds a follow-up scan "confirmed hairline fractures in Biden's lateral and intermediate cuneiform bones, in his right mid-foot, according to his physician, Kevin O'Connor." The AP (11/29, Jaffe) also reports O'Connor in a statement revealed Biden "sustained a sprain of his right foot." Bloomberg (11/29, Korte, Condon, 4.73M) reports Biden will "likely require a walking boot for the next several weeks, his doctor said."

The Hill (11/29, Coleman, 2.98M) provides similar coverage, as did brief ABC World News Tonight (11/29, story 5, 0:35, Llamas, 6.37M), CBS Weekend News (11/29, story 5, 1:10, Yuccas, 10.48M), and NBC Nightly News (11/29, story 5, 0:25, Snow, 3.52M) segments.

Jill Biden Indicates Family Is Planning To Get A Cat. The New York Times (11/28, Waller, 18.61M) reports that during his presidential campaign, Joe Biden "said it was time for a pet to be put back in the White House. First it was announced that Champ and Major, the German shepherds belonging to the president-elect and future first lady Jill Biden, would roam the White House. And now, after an absence of more than a decade, a cat is set to also join the ranks of presidential pets." The Times adds that Dr. Biden in an interview with WTTG-TV Washington (11/28, 72K) "hinted that if her husband won the presidency, she would not mind getting a cat."

The Hill (11/29, Folley, 2.98M) and a brief NBC Nightly News (11/29, story 10, 0:25, Snow, 3.52M) segment provided similar coverage.

Pressure Mounting On Newsom To Appoint Harris Successor.

The New York Times (11/29, Hubler, Burns, 18.61M) reports "the pressure is mounting" on California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) to "appoint someone to fill the soon-to-be-vacant U.S. Senate

seat of Vice President-elect Kamala Harris." While "many names have been floated to succeed Ms. Harris," California Secretary of State Alex Padilla, a "stalwart" Newsom ally, "has emerged as the front-runner, according to more than a half-dozen advisers, political consultants and fellow lawmakers familiar with the governor's thinking." The Times says Newsom "faces extraordinary crosscurrents of factional rivalry and identity politics in a state where the Democratic Party is thoroughly defined by both." Democratic leaders "have sought to tug Mr. Newsom in different directions, playing on what they see as his short- and long-term political aspirations."

Malliotakis Promises A Conservative Counterbalance To AOC's Squad.

Politico (11/29, Semones, 4.29M) reports on CNN's State Of The Union Sunday, Rep.-elect Nicole Malliotakis (R-NY) "promised a conservative answer to Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's 'socialist squad' after a record number of Republican women were elected to serve in the House." Malliotakis told CNN "a natural alliance is occurring among members" of the incoming freshman class of Republicans. She said, "I think what you're going to see is a group of individuals who are going to serve as a counterbalance to the values of the socialist squad. ... I think there's just a stark contrast between what we're offering and what people like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez are offering. And that's something that needs to be debated in Washington."

Facing Criticism After House, Senate Losses, Liberals Working To Exert Influence On Democratic Party. The Washington Post (11/29, Sullivan, Bade, 14.2M) reports liberals are "toiling to exert their influence on a party led by President-elect Joe Biden, an avowed centrist, and his moderate allies on Capitol Hill." Moderates "blame the polarizing themes championed by the left for the party's shrunken House majority and Senate losses. This recrimination from party leaders, along with skepticism from some Biden allies, could limit liberals' ability to influence the party's direction." However, liberals argue "that their base won Biden the White House – and that now they must deliver on promises to pass climate change legislation and fight economic inequality." Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-WA), co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, "and others have argued that the party needs to listen to its liberal members if Democrats want to energize their base to win in 2022."

Virginia Democratic Lawmakers Fear Bill Limits Will Harm Their Agenda.

The Washington Post (11/27, Vozzella, 14.2M) reports that due to the coronavirus pandemic, which "has made the logistics of legislating more difficult, Virginia's House and Senate will strictly limit the number of bills that can be introduced for the General Assembly session that begins Jan. 13." As a result, Virginia lawmakers are being "especially selective about what bills they submit." The Post says some Democratic lawmakers fear the party's agenda could be a "casualty of that policy." However, "many Democrats say it won't hurt the party to be more focused and disciplined – particularly as the GOP tries to portray them as overreaching radicals."

Black Woman To Serve As Brigade Commander At US Naval Academy For The First Time.

The CBS Weekend News (11/29, story 9, 2:40, Yuccas, 10.48M) reported starting next semester, senior Sydney Barber, "a Black woman will serve as Brigade Commander at the US

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Naval Academy." CBS (Miller) added Barber will be the first Back woman to hold the post. Barber: "I'm extremely humbled to play a role in this moment of history. ... For a Black female to be taking command of an institution that once never had a single female, let alone a Black person, it speaks volumes to how far we have come."

Editorial Wrap-Up

New York Times.

"Republicans And Democrats Need To Work Together. Earmarks Can Help." The New York Times (11/29, 18.61M) editorializes that in voting for Joe Biden, Americans "cast a vote for civility, pragmatism and competence. Lawmakers now have a duty to hunker down and find ways to make progress on critical issues. But with both chambers of Congress narrowly divided and ideologically polarized, coming together on even the most modest deals could prove daunting. One promising move under consideration: bringing back congressional earmarks." The Times contends earmarks usually "add up to little more than a rounding error, generally constituting not more than 1 percent of the federal budget," though they can be "used for all kinds of daffy or ill-conceived projects" and occasionally "veers into organized bribery." However, the Times argues the current ban on earmarks "has made Congress less accountable and more dysfunctional."

Washington Post.

"What Biden Needs To Do To Regulate The Internet Both At Home And Worldwide." In an editorial, the Washington Post (11/27, 14.2M) says Joe Biden "is in a position to do for the Web, both worldwide and here at home, what his predecessor has not." The Post sees "ample room for regulating the online realm domestically, though doing so may first require cooperating with a divided Congress." The Post adds that Biden, "with the aid of Congress and allies abroad, now has a chance to establish principles of our own. With them, he can present a compelling alternative to the Chinese model of so-called cybersovereignty to those nations still on the fence about their digital futures – besides helping this nation chart a more promising path for itself. He must not let the opportunity pass him by."

"Trump Pushes An Unprecedented And Unjust Wave Of Executions." In an editorial, the Washington Post (11/26, 14.2M) says the Justice Department "has gone on a sickening spree of executions. Eight people have been put to death in less than five months, and five more executions are planned before the end of President Trump's administration."

"Why Rushing To Privatize Housing Finance Is A Bad Idea." A Washington Post (11/27, 14.2M) editorial argues a privatization of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac "rushed to beat President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration is a bad idea. It might be a bad idea, period: Given the 2008 bailout, selling the two entities off would amount to a taxpayer-enabled windfall for hedge funds and other investors who bought the beaten-down stock speculating on just such a policy change." While "Fannie and Freddie are broken in one sense – they collapsed," they are "quite sound in another: The government propped them up so comprehensively that mortgage markets now function normally." The Post adds, "The Biden administration's most realistic duty is to press ahead with

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incremental improvements that do not require legislation so that Fannie and Freddie may be better positioned for a permanent legislative fix or, at least, to cope with the next crisis, when it inevitably comes."

Wall Street Journal.

"Can Republicans Regroup On Health Care?" A Wall Street Journal (11/29, Subscription Publication, 7.57M) editorial questions when the Republican Party will offer a winning political argument on healthcare. While a slim GOP Senate majority could prevent Joe Biden from passing a "public option," the Journal says that only pushes the matter down the road until Democrats control government. Democrats' ultimate goal, the journal argues, is a government-controlled healthcare monopoly and Republicans should serve as more than a temporary roadblock on the way to that end.

"Team Obama's Iran Illusions." A Wall Street Journal (11/29, Subscription Publication, 7.57M) editorial accuses former President Obama's foreign-policy team of siding with Tehran, accusing the Trump Administration of seeking to undermine diplomacy between an incoming US Administration and Iran.

"The Election Lost In Pennsylvania Court." In an editorial, the Wall Street Journal (11/29, Subscription Publication, 7.57M) criticizes a Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruling regarding ballots that are improperly or insufficiently filled out and calls on lawmakers in the state and across the country to address how to handle such faulty ballots ahead of the next election.

The Big Picture

Headlines From Today's Front Pages.

Wall Street Journal:

S&P Global Nears Deal To Buy IHS Markit For About $44 Billion
Joe Biden Fills Out His Economic Team
GM's Closed Lordstown Factory Spawns A Wave Of Industrial Migrants
Airbnb, DoorDash Aim For Higher-Than-Expected Valuations Ahead Of Debuts
Turkey Leftovers Pile Up After Pandemic-Constrained Thanksgiving
Black Friday Was A Bust For Many Stores, Better For Online

New York Times:

New York City Will Reopen Elementary Schools And Reduce Hybrid Learning
Brazen Killings Expose Iran's Vulnerabilities As It Struggles To Respond
The Lost Days That Made Bergamo A Coronavirus Tragedy
One Seat, Competing Pressures As Newsom Considers Senate Pick
A Rush To Expand The Border Wall That Many Fear Is Here To Stay
Bah, Pandemic! How Theatres Are Saving 'A Christmas Carol'

Washington Post:
'A Bed Is A Gift Right Now'
Homemade Drones Power Turkey's Bid For Influence
Recount Affirms Biden's Wis. Win
Economics, Media Team Picks Break Ground
Brutal Footage Of K-9s Is Canceling The 'Lassie Effect'

Financial Times:
Chinese Consumers Move Towards Forefront Of Economic Recovery
EU Pitches New Post-Trump Alliance With US In Face Of China Challenge
Perella Weinberg Close To Merger With Banking Tycoon's Spac
International Rollout Of Covid-19 Vaccine On Track For Next Month

Washington Times:
'Fort Trump' Falls By The Wayside
Biden's Chief Of Staff Pick Called 'Park Ranger' For Swamp
'Not A Developing Economy': Biden Pressed To Maintain Trump's Pressure On China
Zulu King Reluctantly Holds Reign Despite Cancellation Of Mardi Gras 2021 Parades
Trump Says Judges Refuse To Look At Evidence Of Election Fraud
Democratic Wins In Georgia Create More Sanctuaries

Story Lineup From Last Night's Network News:
ABC: COVID-Travel; COVID-Surge; COVID-Vaccines; Trump-Election Results; Presidential Transition; Iran-Death of Top Scientist; Weather Report; NFL-COVID; Cyber Monday; Massachusetts-Suspect Arrested in String of Violent Attacks; Formula One-Fiery Crash; Vanderbilt-First Woman Power Five Football; Tribute to Actor Who Played Darth Vader.
CBS: COVID-Travel; COVID-Surge; COVID-Overseas; Trump-Election Results; Presidential Transition; US/Cuba Relations; Tribute to Actor Who Played Darth Vader; Hunger Crisis; US Naval Academy-1st Black Female Brigade Commander; Formula One-Fiery Crash; Utah-Mysterious Monolith; Cambodia-Elephant Sanctuary; Holiday Decorations.
NBC: COVID-Travel; COVID-Surge; Presidential Transition; Trump-Election Results; Biden-Sprained Ankle; COVID-Nursing Homes; Cyber Monday; COVID-Vaccines; Tribute to Actor Who Played Darth Vader; Biden-White House Pets; Florida-Officers Do Virtual Storytime For Kids.

Network TV At A Glance:
COVID-Surge – 6 minutes, 45 seconds
COVID-Travel – 6 minutes, 40 seconds
Trump-Election Results – 4 minutes, 55 seconds
Presidential Transition – 2 minutes, 45 seconds

Story Lineup From This Morning's Radio News Broadcasts:

ABC: COVID-Travel; COVID-Surge; NFL-COVID; Trump-Election Results; Biden-Sprained Ankle.
CBS: Biden-Sprained Ankle; Biden-Treasury Secretary Nominee; COVID-Travel; COVID-Surge; Trump-Election Results.
FOX: Biden-Sprained Ankle; Biden-Communications Team; Trump-Election Results; COVID-Vaccines.
NPR: COVID-Travel; Biden-Communications Team; Trump-Election Results; SCOTUS-Census.

Last Laughs

Late Night Political Humor.

No late-night talk shows aired last night.

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From: Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=2D7E368A3137473BBCE161547A82F2DE-CLANE]
Sent: 2/13/2021 4:37:38 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=410e1ca313f44ced9938e50d2ff0b6c2-collinsf]
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] a few follow ups

Flag: Follow up

Thanks for including me. I would suggest Monday.

Just as some background – Mikael may not remember me but very early in the outbreak I spoke with him at your request regarding [b6] the potential role of convalescent plasma.

Cliff

From: "Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]" [b6]
Date: Saturday, February 13, 2021 at 11:17 AM
To: Mikael Dolsten [b6]
Cc: Anthony Fauci [b6], "Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E]" [b6], "Wholley, David (FNIH) [T]" [b6] "Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E]" [b6], "Barasch, Kimberly (NIH/NIAID) [E]" [b6], "Conrad, Patricia (NIH/NIAID) [E]" [b6]
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Best, Francis

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All the best, Francis

From: Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=DF38103D75134F658AE2D356F0396B94-AFAUCI]
Sent: 2/13/2021 4:51:50 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=410e1ca313f44ced9938e50d2ff0b6c2-collinsf]
CC: Barasch, Kimberly (NIH/NIAID) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=ea5fad4c52f64f80b7daee4982ae495f-baraschk]; Conrad, Patricia (NIH/NIAID) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=7ea3e3ea7daa432887495d6825c9e588-conradpa]
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] a few follow ups

Flag: Follow up

I am working most of the day Monday and so Monday is fine with me.

Anthony S. Fauci, MD
Director
National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
Building 31, Room 7A-03
31 Center Drive, MSC 2520
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892-2520

b6

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From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Saturday, February 13, 2021 11:49 AM
To: Dolsten, Mikael b6
Cc: Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Wholley, David (FNIH) [T] b6 Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Barasch, Kimberly (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Conrad, Patricia (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
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Though it's a federal holiday, Monday might also be a possibility – I'd be fine with that.

Francis

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Flag: Follow up

Dear Francis
This is great to hear.

Gretchen can work w Ann to find a time and w Rosalie/Yolanda to plan a brief agenda .

I cc our CEO Albert Bourla a b4,b5 that have led the program in Pfizer to join the meeting.

We look forward to meet you as soon as time permits next week

Best
Mikael

Mikael Dolsten, M.D., Ph.D.
Chief Scientific Officer and President,
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235 East 42nd Street
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Sent: 2/16/2021 12:47:53 PM
Subject: NIH News Briefing for Tuesday, February 16, 2021
Attachments: NIHNewsBriefingFactiva210216.doc

Flag: Follow up

Click to access online version optimized for different mobile platforms, audio version, and fully searchable archives of NIH News Briefings.

DATE: TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2021 7:30 AM EST

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• Fauci Touts Biden Administration's Efforts To Accelerate Distribution Of COVID-19 Vaccines.
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• Fauci Says School Reopening Can Occur Before All Teachers Are Vaccinated.
• Dr. Fauci Cautiously Optimistic For A Complete 2021 MLB Season.
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• Harris Claims Biden Admin 'Starting From Scratch' On Fighting Coronavirus Despite Fauci Saying Otherwise.
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• Winter Coronavirus Wave Ebbs And Deaths Drop, But Experts Fear A Spring Surge.
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• The Superspreaders Behind Top COVID-19 Conspiracy Theories.
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• Fauci Said He Worried About Getting COVID-19 While Working In The 'Superspreader' Trump White House.
• Piecing Together The Next Pandemic.
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• NCI-MATCH Trial Explores Tumor-Agnostic Approach.
• Fecal Transplant Could Boost Immunotherapy To Treat Melanoma.
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• Scientists Generate Detailed Map Of Glioblastoma Genes, Proteins, Infiltrating Cells And Signaling.
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• Study Finds Subway Air Is Heavily Contaminated With Hazardous Pollutants.
• VCU's Rob Winn Reflects On A Year Of COVID, Racial Reckoning, And Being The Sole Black Director Of An NCI-Designated Cancer Center.
• Pharmacies Move To The Forefront Of The U.S. Vaccine Campaign.
• Biden Says 'Almost Everybody' Could Have COVID-19 Vaccines By 'The End Of Summer'.
• A Mysterious COVID Syndrome Still Stalks N.J.'s Kids. Doctors Remain On Alert As Cases Rise.
• ACTIV-2 Looks Beyond MAb Infusions With Four New Treatment Arms.
• Biden Grapples With Balancing Optimism And Tough Talk On Pandemic's Outlook.
• Melania Trump Honors Valentine's Day With Heartwarming Message To Sick Children At National Institute Of Health.
• COVID-19 Virus Variants Are Evolving 'Escape' Mutations, And Immune-Compromised Patients Provide A Breeding Ground.
• Biden To Tour Pfizer Vaccine Facility In Portage Next Week.
• Women Need To Be Equally Represented In NIH Study Sections.
• Schumer, Gillibrand Announce $1M In Grants For Cancer, Vision Research.
• Precision Medicine Program Analyzes Diverse Genetic Dataset.
• As Scientists Study Tattoo Ink Safety, Europe Bans Two Widely Used Pigments.

Health & Medical News

- Biden To Extend Home Foreclosure Ban, Expand Mortgage Relief Program.
- Biden Administration Consulting With Tech Giants To Improve COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.
- Millions Of Rapid COVID-19 Tests Purchased By Feds Remain Unused.
- US Employers Have Difficulty Filling Some Jobs Due To Ban On Foreign Workers Amid Pandemic.
- Biden To Discuss Pandemic During Virtual G7 Meeting On Friday.
- Experts Say Feds Need Targeted Messages To Encourage COVID-19 Vaccinations, Not National Campaigns.
- Members Of US Public Health Service Still Awaiting Their Own COVID-19 Vaccines.
- Poll Indicates 24% Of Americans Were Unable To Obtain COVID-19 Tests.
- Pentagon Approves 20 More Teams To Help FEMA With COVID-19 Vaccinations.
- Black Americans In Tuskegee Afraid To Receive COVID-19 Vaccine Due To "Infamous" Syphilis Study.
- GOP Using Reopening Of Schools As Political Hammer Against Biden, Dems.
- Slavitt Says Everyone Should Be More Cautious As The UK Variant Spreads In The US.
- Slavitt Says Biden Administration Believes There Will Be Enough COVID-19 Vaccines For All Americans By July.
- Expert Says UK Variant May Make It Challenging For Schools To Reopen.
- Kamala Harris Says Mass Exodus Of Women From US Workforce Amid Pandemic Is A "National Emergency."
- Commentary Says CDC's Guidelines For Reopening Schools Smack Of "Expediency."
- Commentary: US Should Focus On Vaccinating As Many As Possible Quickly, Not On Who Gets Vaccinated.
- Commentary: Biden Administration Must Take Steps To Ensure Children Return To School This Fall.
- Commentary Says US' COVID-19 "Vaccine Protocol Is Failing Miserably."
- Commentary Slams Biden's School Reopening Goal.
- Commentary Says "Political Pressures" Influenced CDC's Guidelines On School Reopening.
- Louisiana To Begin Enforcing Mask Requirement For Almost All Ferry Passengers.
- Connecticut Governor Credits Vaccinations With Drop In COVID-19 Infection Rate.
- Officials In Kenosha County, Wisconsin Cracking Down On Illinois Residents Crossing Border To Receive COVID-19 Vaccine.
- Georgia Lawmakers Considering Legislation Requiring Hospitals, Nursing Homes To Allow Visitors Amid Pandemic.
- Ohio Governor Rebukes School Officials For Backtracking On In-Person Learning Commitments.
- Connecticut Officials Aim To Address Racial Gap In COVID-19 Vaccinations.
- Iowa Officials Change Decision To Withhold COVID-19 Vaccines From Certain Counties.
- Several COVID-19 Vaccination Sites To Reopen Tuesday In Los Angeles.
- Healthcare Systems In Minnesota Start COVID-19 Vaccination Outreach Programs For Hard-Hit Communities.
- Plan To Vaccinate More Massachusetts Seniors Against COVID-19 Sparks Concerns.
- Kansas Attempting To Fix System For Sending COVID-19 Vaccine Information To US Government.
- Virginia ICUs Hitting Full Capacity Despite Stabilizing Number Of Hospitalizations.
- Editorial Criticizes US Supreme Court's Ruling On California's COVID-19 Restrictions For Places Of Worship.
- Beaumont Health Cancels Over 1,800 COVID-19 Vaccination Appointments Due To Reduction In Allocation From Michigan.

- Child Care Workers Now Prioritized For COVID-19 Vaccine In Kentucky.
- Blue Shield Of California Secures Contract To Boost COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution.
- Pennsylvania's Data On Ethnicity, Race In COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Reportedly Lacking.
- Connecticut Teachers Push For School Employees To Be Prioritized In COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.
- Rhode Island Lieutenant Governor "Not Satisfied" With State's COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.
- Commentary Discusses How To Ensure Communities Of Color Receive COVID-19 Vaccines.
- Governors Urge Biden To Give Them More Say In How Feds Distribute COVID-19 Vaccines.
- Opinion: California Must Create COVID-19 Vaccination Plan For ICE Facilities.
- UK Coronavirus Variant Detected In New Hampshire For First Time.
- University Of Central Florida Student Contracts UK Coronavirus Variant.
- New York's COVID-19 Seven-Day Positivity Rate Reaches Lowest Mark Since End Of November.
- Los Angeles County Seeing Drop In COVID-19 Cases.
- Navy Says Three Sailors Aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt Tested Positive For COVID-19.
- Texas Health Officials Warn Of "Rapid Growth" Of UK COVID-19 Variant.
- Second Case Of UK Coronavirus Variant Found In Kansas.
- Connecticut Confirms First Case Of South Africa COVID-19 Variant.
- UK Coronavirus Variant Likely 30-70% More Deadly, Study Suggests.
- HHS To Extend Liability Protections Amid COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.
- Novavax To Complete US Vaccine Trial Enrollment In Record Time.
- Pfizer Confident It Can Deliver 2B COVID-19 Vaccine Doses This Year As Company Ramps Up Capacity, Executive Says.
- Pfizer Vaccine Proves Effective In Israel.
- US Hits Milestone With 50M COVID-19 Vaccine Doses Administered.
- Walmart Starts Large-Scale Vaccine Distribution.
- FDA Allows Moderna To Increase Quantity Of Its COVID-19 Vaccine In Each Vial.
- Possibly Thousands Of Foreign Nationals Have Received COVID-19 Vaccine In US.
- Sanofi CEO Admits COVID-19 Vaccine "Will Not Be Ready This Year."
- AstraZeneca, Oxford University Start Testing COVID-19 Vaccine In Children.
- Physicians Aiming To Combat Anti-Vaccine Misinformation.
- Despite Initial Promises, Most Of Moderna's COVID-19 Vaccine Doses Sold Only To Rich Countries.
- Men Accused Of Creating Fake Site To Sell COVID-19 Vaccines.
- Black Americans Reportedly Disadvantaged By COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout That Prioritizes Those Over 75.
- MSU Researcher Tests Cannabis-Based Drug To Fight COVID-19.
- Child Care Workers Reportedly Being Left Behind In COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.
- HIV Activists Fought For Inclusion In COVID-19 Vaccine Trials.
- Residents At One West Virginia Nursing Home Finish Receiving COVID-19 Vaccinations.
- Massachusetts Baby Boomers Waiting To Get COVID-19 Vaccine As State Prioritizes Those Over 75.
- Republicans Nationwide More Supportive Of Biden Relief Plan Than GOP Lawmakers.
- NYTimes Analysis: Biden, Fed Cast Aside Inflation Worries To Push COVID-19 Relief.
- Activists Reportedly Worry Biden Undermines Minimum Wage Effort In COVID-19 Relief.
- Opinion: COVID Relief Bill Debate Misses Point Of Stimulus.

• WPost Analysis: State And Local Governments Cut 1.3M Jobs During Pandemic.
• Opinion: Finance Guru Dave Ramsey Was Wrong To Mock Stimulus Checks.
• Biden's $3,000 Per-Child Benefit May Face Challenges, Experts Warn.
• Coronavirus Stimulus Recipients Boost Consumer Spending.
• Remote Learning Amid COVID-19 Leads To Weight Gain Among Children, Doctors Warn.
• Former CDC Director Discusses Steps To Prepare For Future Pandemics.
• FDA Approves Becton Dickinson Rapid COVID-19, Flu Test.
• COVID-19 Leaving Millions Jobless, Taking A Toll On Mental Health.
• States Expanding COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Faster Than They Can Receive Adequate Doses.
• Iowa Lags In Delivery Of COVID-19 Vaccine Because Of Inadequate Preparation, Lack Of Staff, Other Issues.
• Black Hospital Workers In Chicago Refuse COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Providing COVID-19 Vaccine To LA's Homeless People "Fraught With Obstacles."
• New Health Department Data In California Show Disparities In COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution.
• Philadelphia Shutters Mass COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic Amid Concerns About Personal Data.
• College Campus Housing Staff Push For Access To COVID-19 Vaccine.
• New York Governor Faces New Allegations Of Covering Up Nursing Home Deaths.
• New Jersey Officials Blame Microsoft Glitches For COVID-19 Vaccination Appointment Issues.
• Montana Governor Lifts Mask Mandate.
• Massachusetts Medical Leaders Disagree With Governor's Plan To Pause COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution To Hospitals.
• Washington State To Focus On Second COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.
• People With Disabilities Are Afraid They Will Be Left Behind In The COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.
• Two San Francisco Mass COVID-19 Vaccination Sites Temporarily Shutter Due To Lack Of Supply.
• Experts Warn New Spike In COVID-19 Cases Could Occur This Summer If States Prematurely Lift Restrictions.
• Data Show Only 11% Of Alabamians Who Received COVID-19 Vaccine Are Black.
• Pennsylvania Secretary Of Health Orders Providers To Administer 80% Of First Doses Within Seven Days Of Receiving COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Colorado Eases Restrictions On Indoor Dining.
• One-Third Of Residents In Tuluksak, Alaska Diagnosed With COVID-19.
• Californians With Underlying Health Conditions Will Be Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine March 15.
• Florida Emergency Management Official Overseeing COVID-19 Response Resigns.
• Oklahoma Health Officials Learn Federally Supported COVID-19 Vaccination Sites Do Not Come With Additional Vaccines.
• Amazon Sues New York Attorney General To Stop COVID-19 Charges.
• Massachusetts Offers COVID-19 Vaccine To Those Who Accompany Elders To Mass Vaccination Sites.
• California Church Postpones Conference After LA County Health Officials Warn Indoor Conferences Are Prohibited.
• Disability Rights Advocates Urge Massachusetts To Expand COVID-19 Vaccine Priority To More People With Underlying Conditions.
• Massachusetts Legislators Urge Governor To Modify COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.

• Experts Fear Massachusetts' Decision To Stop New COVID-19 Vaccine Appointments At Hospitals Could Be Disruptive.
• DC, Maryland, Virginia Could Receive More Than $14B In Direct COVID-19 Relief Funding.
• Prince George's County Officials Apologize For Faulty Vaccine Rollout.
• Virginia Democrats To Unveil Legislation To Reopen Schools.
• Virginia To Launch Statewide System For COVID-19 Vaccine Scheduling.
• St. Louis-Area Group Homes Struggle To Find COVID-19 Vaccine For Residents.
• Some Fitness Trainers Received COVID-19 Vaccine As "Health Care Workers" In California.
• Minnesota Health Officials Remind Residents To Wear Masks.
• Governor Says Minnesota Could Lead The Way On Resuming In-Person Learning.
• Governor Says President Biden Is Targeting Florida Despite Pandemic Success.
• Nebraska Governor Continues To Focus On Vaccinating Older Residents Despite Pressure From Teachers.
• Chicago-Area Counties Have Some Of The Lowest COVID-19 Vaccination Rates In Illinois.
• Ohio Governor Suggests He Will Withhold Teachers' COVID-19 Vaccinations If Schools Don't Open By March 1.
• Courts Unlikely To Grant COVID-19 Restriction, Lockdown Challenges By Individuals, Businesses.
• LA County Hospital Violated Rules By Providing COVID-19 Vaccine To Private School Teachers.
• California's COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Plagued By Data Issues, Inaccuracies.
• New Yorkers With Chronic Health Conditions Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Nebraska Orders 90% Of COVID-19 Vaccine Doses Go To People Aged 65 And Older.
• Congressional Lawmakers Ask HHS To Ban Preferential Access To COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Honolulu Mayor Extends COVID-19 Restrictions.
• White House Calls On China To Make Data Available On Early Days Of Pandemic.
• Research Encourages People To Spend Time In Nature To Stay Healthy.
• Older Americans Consider Resuming Certain Activities Following COVID-19 Vaccinations.
• Professionals "Increasingly Alarmed" By "Deteriorating Mental State Of Young People."
• Scientists Envision Surveillance System For New Viruses.
• Pandemics Throughout History Have Spawned Extremist Movements, Experts Say.
• House Hopes To Set Aside $50M For Increased Toy, Consumer Product Safety Screenings.
• CDC Data Indicate US Has Administered 52.9M Doses Of COVID-19 Vaccine.
• COVID-19 May Never Disappear, And May Become Another Illness Humans Must Contend With, Experts Predict.
• US Hospitals Say Supplies Of PPE, Other Crucial Medical Equipment At All-Time Low As Pandemic Persists.
• Children Not Receiving Dental Care Amid Pandemic.
• Four Drugmakers To Write Off Part Of Opioid Settlement Costs.
• Weekly Trips To ED For Drug Overdoses Were Higher In 2020 Than 2019, Study Indicates.
• Public Health Experts Pressuring Biden Administration To Address Rise In Drug Overdose Deaths.
• BMS, Sanofi Ordered To Pay More Than $834M For Clopidogrel Marketing.
• Experts Excited By Preliminary Study Of Drug Designed To Treat Hunter Syndrome.
• E-Cigarette Ad Appears On Remote Learning App, Prompting Colorado Lawmaker To Consider Stricter Marketing Regulations.

• Erie School District Joins Many Others In Filing Suit Against Juul For Allegedly Targeting Minors.
• North Dakota House Rejects Bills That Would Increase Taxes On Cigarettes, Other Tobacco Products.
• Opinion: Minnesota Governor Wants To Penalize Retailers, Consumers By Raising Cigarette, Moist Snuff Taxes.
• Rep. Josh Gottheimer Sponsored Anti-Vaping Legislation While Investing In Tobacco Conglomerate.
• South Carolina Bill Would Ban Local Municipalities From Enacting Laws Related To Certain Cigarette, Vape, Nicotine Products.
• South Carolina Lawmakers Looking To Break Apart State's Bloated Health, Environmental Agency.
• Drinking Caffeinated Coffee Could Reduce Heart Failure Risk, Analysis Suggests.
• US Breast Cancer Death Rates No Longer Decreasing, Study Finds.
• Delaying Sleep With Mindless TV, Internet Browsing May Increase Stress, Experts Warn.
• Some States Urge Federal Court To Allow Obtaining Abortion Pills Via Telemedicine.
• CDC Calls For Action In West Virginia HIV Outbreak.
• Depression Symptoms Three Times Greater Since Pandemic, Survey Finds.
• State Lawmakers Taking More Action To Stop Drugmakers From Price Hikes Absent Federal Policy.
• Analysis: Biden Faces Challenges In Confronting Pandemic.
• Physicians Seeing Striking Increase In Cases Of MIS-C.
• Some Providers In Greater DC Region Reportedly Concerned About Availability Of Second COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.

Global Health News

• WHO Authorizes Use Of AstraZeneca-Oxford Coronavirus Vaccine.
• COVID-19 Vaccine Becomes Touchy Subject Ahead Of Olympics.
• Incoming WTO Chief Warns Against "Vaccine Nationalism" Amid Pandemic.
• British Prime Minister Says World Powers Should Agree To Treaty On Pandemics To Ensure Transparency.
• South Africa Asks Serum Institute Of India To Take Back 1M COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.
• Israel Reports Three South African Variant Infections In People Who Had Recovered From A Previous Coronavirus Infection.
• Numerous Lower-Income Countries Still Waiting For COVID-19 Vaccine As 152M Doses Have Been Administered Globally.
• Malaysia Launching Rollout Of Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine Next Week.
• Australia Approves COVID-19 Vaccine From AstraZeneca.
• Chinese Government Weaponized COVID-19 Origin Disinformation Against US Through Internet, Analysis Says.
• WHO Scientists Discuss Team's Findings During Wuhan Visit.
• WHO Chief Does Not Rule Out Any Explanations For COVID-19 Origin.
• WHO Investigators Say China Refused To Provide Key Data.
• COVID-19 Already Spreading In Wuhan By December 2019, WHO Says.
• UK Vaccinates Nearly 25% Of Population, Begins Hotel Quarantines For Arrivals From 33 Countries.
• UK Drug Regulator Auditing Serum Institute's Manufacturing In India To Allow Import Of COVID-19 Vaccines.
• EU's Anti-Fraud Office Warns Member States Against COVID-19 Vaccine Scams.

• EU In Talks With Moderna To Buy More COVID-19 Vaccines.
• Israel Combatting COVID-19 Vaccine Misinformation.
• Zimbabwe Receives First Shipment Of Sinopharm's COVID-19 Vaccine From China.
• No Evidence Of Community Spread Of COVID-19 In Auckland Since New Lockdown.
• Peru's Foreign Minister Steps Down Amid Backlash From Government Officials Secretly Getting COVID-19 Vaccine Early.
• Italian Government Delays Opening Ski Reason Due To Coronavirus Variant.
• Giving AstraZeneca's COVID-19 Vaccine To People In Italy Under 65 Is Acceptable, Official Says.
• Czech Government Declares New State Of Emergency.
• Germany Tightens Controls At Borders With Czechia.
• Japan Approves Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine.
• WHO Chief Urges Vigilance Against COVID-19 Despite Improving Numbers.
• Johnson Planning Cautious But Irreversible Path Out Of COVID-19 Lockdown.
• Pan-European Consortium Talking With Big Pharma To Support Late-Stage COVID-19 Vaccine Development.
• South Africa Approves Study Of Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Pakistani Lab To Receive Sputnik V COVID-19 Vaccine Doses For Commercial Sale Soon.
• Mexico Receives 870,000 Doses Of AstraZeneca Vaccine.
• Pfizer Not Planning Herd Immunity Study In Iceland Due To Its Declining COVID-19 Infection Rate.
• UK Unprepared To Deliver Key Public Messages At Start Of Pandemic, Former Adviser Says.
• UK Government Pressured To Reopen Schools Slowly Next Month.
• Keeping Schools Open Without Masks, Quarantines Doubled Swedish Teachers' COVID-19 Risk, Study Finds.
• Many Claim Strict European Lockdowns Brought Down R Value Of COVID-19.
• Italian Venture Looking To Boost Production Of COVID-19 Shots Faces Shortages Of Key Supplies.
• WPost: China's Reassurances On Coronavirus Origins Are Insufficient.
• Some Europeans Balk At Getting AstraZeneca's COVID-19 Vaccine They Perceive As Less Effective.
• India Using COVID-19 Vaccine Supply To Boost Diplomatic Ties.
• China Sends 200,000 Sinopharm Doses To Zimbabwe.
• Brazil Confirms Cases Of UK Coronavirus Strain.
• Guinea Health Officials Declare New Ebola Outbreak.
• Congo Begins Ebola Vaccination Campaign.
• Cuba Struggles With Access To Clean Running Water.

HHS in the News

• CDC Releases New Guidelines For Reopening Schools.
• ACA Support Groups Fear Lack Of Funding May Prevent Their Ability To Help Consumers.
• Former Trump Health Aide Exploring Bid For US House Seat.
• Some Calling For Senators To Hold Confirmation Hearing For Biden's HHS Secretary Nominee.
• Former HHS Secretary Sebelius Stresses Need For Americans To "Stay Vigilant" During Pandemic.
• Commentary Outlines Steps To Help Businesses Reduce Risk Of Regulatory Action By State AGs Amid Pandemic.
• CDC Director Discusses UK Coronavirus Variant, School Reopening During Interviews.

• CDC Director Says It Is Too Early To Lift Mask Mandates.
• Biden Administration Accused Of Throwing CDC Director "Under The Bus."
• CDC Says It Currently Has No Plans To Mandate COVID-19 Tests For Domestic Flights.
• US Initiative To Vaccinate Nursing Home Residents, Staff Against Coronavirus To Be Completed A Month Late.
• Former Education Secretary Says It Is A "Scandal" For Schools To Still Be Shut Down.
• Republicans Urge Biden To Help Reopen Schools.
• Scientists Split On Why COVID-19 Infections Are Dropping In US.
• Model Projects 130,000 Additional US Deaths From COVID-19 Over Next Three And A Half Months.
• COVID-19 Vaccine Makers, Regulators Deciding On Making Updates To Vaccines.
• Gottlieb Argues Biden Administration Should Undertake More "Bespoke" Efforts In Coronavirus Vaccine Campaign.
• Experts Warn Of Possible Fourth Wave Of Coronavirus As Governors Loosen Restrictions.
• Biden Administration Moves To Roll Back Medicaid Work Requirements.
• Biden Reestablishes White House Office Of Faith-Based And Neighborhood Partnerships.
• WHO Director-General Says He Discussed US Participation In COVAX With CDC Director.

National Front Page News

• Headlines From Today's Front Pages.

Last Laughs

• Late Night Political Humor.

National News

• Pelosi Says Congress Will Create Commission To Examine Capitol Riot.
• Biden Spent Weekend At Camp David.
• Biden Administration Could Take Action On Unregulated Toxic "Forever Chemicals."
• Republican Senators Who Voted To Convict Trump Face Backlash From State Parties.
• Dingell And Tlaib Promote Legislation To Create Local Water Fund.
• Millions Without Power, 150M Under Storm Warnings Across US.
• Nevada Bill Would Replace Caucuses With First-In-The-Nation Presidential Primary.
• McConnell Suggests He May Intervene In 2022 GOP Senate Primaries.
• Perdue Files Paperwork For Likely Challenge To Warnock.
• State Senator Enters Iowa GOP Senate Race; Grandson Expects Grassley To Run Again.
• Republican Schimpf Enters Illinois Gubernatorial Race.
• GOP Donor Who Gave $2.5M For Voter Fraud Probe Sues To Get His Money Back.
• Lincoln Project Subject Of Allegations Regarding Sexual Harassment By Weaver.

NIH News

Biden's Vaccine Push Runs Into Distrust In The Black Community.

The Washington Post (2/13, Wootson, Sellers, 10.52M) reported that Cameron Webb, the Biden Administration's "senior policy adviser for covid-19 equity, acknowledged the administration is 'swimming upstream' when it

comes to vaccine hesitancy" especially among Blacks who point to the infamous Tuskegee incident. Webb "said it is working to get information into the hands of influencers and community leaders who can spread the word and dispel rumors." The article said President Biden tackled "the issue directly Thursday when he visited the National Institutes of Health, where he was hosted by NIH Director Francis Collins and" NIAID Director Dr. Anthony S. Fauci. Biden stated, "I know people want confidence that it's safe. Well, listen to Dr. Fauci. I did. I got my shots. ... It's safe. And we need more people to get vaccinated to beat this pandemic."

Biden And His Team Continue To Ignore COVID-19 Science.

In an opinion piece for the Washington Times (2/15, 626K), contributor Tim Constantine says "one of President Biden's go-to speech lines is how important it is to follow the science. He repeats it over and over. Follow the science. Follow the science." Constantine asserts that "if the mantra is to 'follow the science,' every school in America should be open with classrooms full of students," and Biden's "failure to adhere to his own suggestion of following the science isn't limited to the classroom either." Constantine concludes that Biden's "response has been choreographed for show rather than based on any real science or designed for actual results. America should fear his shameless empty political theater even more than the virus itself." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci and NIH Director Francis Collins are mentioned.

The Vaccines Will End The Pandemic – Whether Dr. Fauci Likes It Or Not.

In an opinion piece for the New York Post (2/15, 7.45M), contributor Karol Markowicz writes, "Repeat after me: Vaccines will end the pandemic. This bears repeating, as some elites seem bent on prolonging restrictions for a long time, perhaps indefinitely." According to Markowicz, "if they have their way, we will wear masks for years, continue to socially distance and never get back to our regular lives." Markowicz concludes, "We need people to get vaccinated, and the way to speed up this process is to assure people that their lives – their masked, isolated, miserable lives – will change with the shots. Again: Vaccines will end the pandemic. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci, NIH Director Francis Collins, and CDC Director Rochelle Walensky are mentioned.

Fauci Touts Biden Administration's Efforts To Accelerate Distribution Of COVID-19 Vaccines.

On ABC's Good Morning America (2/12, 3.11M), NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci discussed the Biden Administration's efforts to accelerate COVID-19 vaccine distribution, saying "there are a few things that the President has put into the strategic plan, one, you just heard reported by the correspondent, namely, getting vaccines into pharmacies where people could conveniently get vaccinated. The other is the standing up of at least 100 vaccine centers, community vaccine centers and the other is to use mobile units to get into not easily accessible areas. So those are just three of the things as you say to kind of loosen up the bottleneck of getting doses into the arms of individuals. You've heard right now we have contracted for a total of 600 million, which would be just enough and maybe a little more to vaccinate everyone with two doses."

Schools Must Have COVID Relief Funds And More Resources To Reopen Safely, Fauci Says.

McClatchy (2/15, Aldridge, 29K) reports that according to NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, "a COVID-19 stimulus package needs to pass for schools to reopen safely." He discussed the matter during an appearance on ABC's "This Week," explaining that "school districts will need more resources to follow" the new guidelines the CDC recently unveiled.

Additional Sources. The Hill (2/14, Choi, 5.69M) reported that Fauci stated, "I think that the schools really do need more resources and that's the reason why the national relief act that we're talking about getting passed – we need that. The schools need more resources."

Newsweek (2/14, Garrett, 2.67M) and the Washington Examiner (2/14, Colton, 888K) also covered the story.

Americans Will Need To Wear Masks For 'Several, Several Months' As COVID-19 Vaccinations Rollout, Fauci Says.

The Hill (2/12, Guzman, 5.69M) reported that NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "says people will need to continue wearing masks to curb the spread of the coronavirus for the next 'several, several months' as the nation races to get vaccines into the arms of Americans." Fauci told ABC, "Hopefully by the time we get all the people vaccinated, let's say 70 to 85 percent of the people vaccinated, the level of virus in the community could be so low that you could start pulling back a bit on the stringent public health measures." He added, "You don't want to do it all at once, but I think we're going to be wearing masks for several, several months into the future."

Dr. Fauci Feared Catching COVID-19 In Trump's 'Super-Spreader' White House.

HuffPost (2/15, Moye, 363K) reports NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, "who serves as chief medical adviser to the president, told Axios.com that he occasionally feared contracting COVID-19 when he visited the White House when Donald Trump was president." Fauci stated, "I didn't fixate on that, but it was in the back of my mind because I had to be out there. ... I mean, particularly when I was going to the White House every day when the White House was sort of a super-spreader location."

Fauci Says School Reopening Can Occur Before All Teachers Are Vaccinated.

On ABC's This Week (2/15, 295K), NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci discussed the CDC's new guidelines for reopening schools, saying, "There's a lot of layering to the mitigations, George, and I think the point to make [is] it's totally understandable teachers' concern, we appreciate that. The issue is that there are a lot of things that can be done and they're really delineated pretty clearly in...the guidelines that are coming out that would make the risk less and this is the first time that it's been put down in a document based on scientific observations and data over the last several months to a year, both in the United States and elsewhere. Part of that is to indicate and to suggest strongly that a preference be given to teachers to get vaccinated. So vaccinating teachers are a part of it, but it's not something that you can't open a school unless all the teachers are vaccinated."

Additional Sources. ABC News (2/14, Arnholz, 2.44M) reported that Fauci also said, "When you balance the benefit of getting the children back to school with the fact that the risks are being mitigated if you follow the recommendations and these new guidelines from the CDC, hopefully, I think that will alleviate the concerns on both sides." The article said although "many leading teachers unions and advocacy groups have praised the new guidelines, several have raised concerns about how the CDC standards are still not being met in many schools in underprivileged communities."

The New York Daily News (2/14, Shahrigian, 2.51M) and the New York Post (2/14, Salo, 7.45M) also covered the story.

Dr. Fauci Cautiously Optimistic For A Complete 2021 MLB Season.

The New York Times (2/13, Wagner, 20.6M) reported, "As far as Dr. Anthony S. Fauci can recall, last season was the first time his life was almost completely devoid of watching baseball." In an interview with the New York Times on Friday, Fauci said, "It was just really terrible." In the interview, "Fauci discussed the public health challenges ahead, his optimism that a normal 162-game season can be played, his belief that fans can return safely to the stands outdoors and what he told baseball officials."

Anthony Fauci Warns Americans Not To Let Down Their Guard About COVID-19 Variants.

Axios (2/15, Talev, 1.26M) reports, "President Biden's chief medical adviser, Dr. Anthony Fauci, tells 'Axios on HBO' that despite the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines, emerging variants could pose a 'stumbling block' and Americans shouldn't become complacent." The NIAID director said, "You don't want people to become complacent. We still have a long way to go ... We still might have a stumbling block coming with the appearance of variants that would dominate the picture."

Additional Source. Axios (2/14, Talev, 1.26M) reported that in the interview, Fauci expressed sympathy for people who are single and "trying to enjoy Valentine's Day during the pandemic," adding that "it would be stressful and frustrating to date while social distancing and trying to stay safe."

Fauci Wins $1 Million Israeli Prize For 'Defending Science'.

The AP (2/15, Kellman) reports, "Dr. Anthony Fauci has won the $1 million Dan David Prize for 'defending science' and advocating for vaccines now being administered worldwide to fight the coronavirus pandemic." On Monday, the Israel-based Dan David Foundation "named President Joe Biden's chief medical adviser as the winner of one of three prizes," saying "he had earned the recognition over a lifetime of leadership on HIV research and AIDS relief, as well as his advocacy for the vaccines against COVID-19." Fauci "has served seven presidents and has been the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases since 1984."

Additional Sources. NPR (2/15, Estrin, 3.69M) reports that in 2003, Fauci "helped launch the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief under the George W. Bush administration, which the NIH credits with saving millions of lives in the developing world." The three awards this year are "focused on health and medicine." According to the AP, "Zelig Eshhar of Israel's Weizmann Institute of Science, Carl June of the University of Pennsylvania and Steven Rosenberg of the NIH National Cancer Institute are sharing a $1 million prize for pioneering anti-cancer immunotherapy."

The Philadelphia Inquirer (2/15, McCullough) reports, "June led the groundbreaking work at the University of Pennsylvania and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia that culminated in the FDA approval in August 2017 of Kymriah, the first personalized cellular therapy for cancer. It treats adult and pediatric blood cancers such as leukemia."

Among other sources covering the story are The Hill (2/15, Lonas, 5.69M), CNBC (2/16, 7.34M), the New York Post (2/15, O'Neill, 7.45M), and the Daily Caller (2/15, 375K).

Harris Claims Biden Admin 'Starting From Scratch' On Fighting Coronavirus Despite Fauci Saying Otherwise.

Fox News (2/15, Singman, 23.99M) reports Vice President Kamala Harris said during "a new interview that the Biden administration is 'starting from scratch' on a national vaccination strategy amid the coronavirus pandemic, despite Dr. Anthony Fauci saying otherwise last month." Harris told Axios, "There was no national strategy or plan for vaccinations, we were leaving it to the states and local leaders to try to figure it out. ... So, in many ways, we're starting from scratch on something that's been raging for almost an entire year."

Additional Sources. The New York Post (2/15, Moore, 7.45M) reports Harris also stated, "The suffering...is so immense in terms of both the public health crisis, the number of people who have died, the number of people who've contracted it, and the economic crisis." She added, "We've got to figure out a way – that has to be our standard. Our standard has to be: 'Everything is possible, but we're going to have to work like heck to get it done.' Which means … no patience for delay, no patience for, 'It can't be done.' You know, that's how I feel about it."

Among other news outlets covering the story are the Washington Times (2/15, Chasmar, 626K), the Washington Examiner (2/15, Scarry, 888K) and the Daily Caller (2/15, Ross, 375K).

Ben Domenech: Dr. Fauci, Teachers' Unions Taking 'Nonsensical' Stance On School Reopenings.

Fox News (2/15, Lanum, 23.99M) reports, "Fox News contributor Ben Domenech slammed Dr. Anthony Fauci for 'crossing a significant line' by making a 'partisan case' on Monday, after President Joe Biden's chief medical advisor claimed that schools need the new COVID relief bill to pass in order to reopen safely." He "questioned Fauci on why he believes more money is needed, based on the knowledge that in December billions of dollars were set aside in Washington D.C. for the purpose of providing the tools needed to meet reopening safety criteria in public school districts."

When Will COVID Vaccines Be Available For Everyone? Biden, Fauci Offer Rough Timeline.

McClatchy (2/12, Camero, 29K) reported that since President Biden took office, "America's capacity to manufacture and administer COVID-19 vaccines has accelerated, though experts admit much more work needs to be done to get a handle on the pandemic." Recently, "health and government officials...announced major deals with vaccine developers and ambitious goals to increase vaccination rates." On Friday, NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci told ABC News that "as we go from April to May to June and then hopefully by July, we'll be at that point where we have enough vaccine for virtually everyone."

CDC Defends School Guidelines As Advocates Say They Make It Too Hard To Reopen.

The Washington Post (2/14, Meckler, 10.52M) reported President Biden has been pushing for "schools to reopen, and promised that guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would help them do so safely." Meanwhile, "public health experts including some at the CDC said available evidence suggested schools could safely open as long as precautions were in place. That raised expectations that the nation's K-12 education system might accelerate its return to in-person learning." However, "the much-anticipated guidelines released Friday were, in fact, more measured than some expected, with full in-person schooling recommended

only when levels of community transmission are quite low, a standard that almost no place in the U.S. meets today." On Sunday, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky defended her agency's guidelines.

Additional Sources. CNN (2/14, Duster, Thomas, 89.21M) reported that Walensky "emphasized the need for masking and other mitigation measures in order to reopen schools safely, saying 'we have work to do' as teachers, students and parents continue to struggle with Covid-19's impact on education." She told CNN, "We have work to do, especially when the country remains in the red zone of high community transmission. As that transmission comes down we'll be able to relax some of these measures, but the real point is to make sure that the science is consistent with our guidance, which is consistent to say until we can ensure that we have all those measures happening that there would – schools wouldn't be safe." Meanwhile, NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci told ABC News that "teachers' concerns about going back to school without being vaccinated are understandable, but he hopes that the new guidance from the CDC will help alleviate them."

The Hill (2/14, Bowden, 5.69M) reported Walensky also told CNN that it is not essential for all teachers to be vaccinated before schools can reopen. Walensky said, "I'm a strong advocate of teachers receiving their vaccinations, but we don't believe it's a prerequisite for reopening schools." She added, "We have in the guidance clear language that specifies that teachers that are at higher risk...teachers and students that are higher risk, and their families, should have options for virtual activities, virtual learning, virtual teaching."

In a separate article, The Hill (2/14, Budryk, 5.69M) reported "Walensky said on Sunday that despite new guidance from the agency for reopening schools, 'I think we need a lot more resources in order to get the schools safe.'" On "Fox News Sunday," Walensky stated, "One of the things that's really been emphasized in the school reopening is how unsafe some of our school ventilations are."

Fox News (2/14, Aitken, 23.99M) also covers the story.

Winter Coronavirus Wave Ebbs And Deaths Drop, But Experts Fear A Spring Surge.

The Washington Post (2/12, Achenbach, Shammas, Nirappil, Dupree, 10.52M) reported "the catastrophic winter wave of the coronavirus pandemic that was killing more than 20,000 people a week in the United States has subsided dramatically, giving a reprieve to stressed hospitals and in recent days driving new infection numbers below 100,000 for the first time since early November." However, "infectious-disease experts caution that the virus remains a threat, with the pathogen circulating at high rates and killing more than 2,000 people a day." The fading "days of this pandemic winter could yield to another wave of infections propelled by mutated variants of the virus that have taken root, with 997 infections attributed to them nationwide by Thursday night."

Additional Sources. The AP (2/14, Thanawala, Brumback) reported "average daily new coronavirus cases in the United States dipped below 100,000 in recent days for the first time in months, but experts cautioned Sunday that infections remain high and precautions to slow the pandemic must remain in place." CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said, "We are still at about 100,000 cases a day. We are still at around 1,500 to 3,500 deaths per day. The cases are more than two-and-a-half-fold times what we saw over the summer." The AP added that NIAID Director "Anthony Fauci said on ABC's 'This Week' that it would be 'optimal' if teachers were vaccinated but that other measures...can lessen their risk."

NBC News (2/15, Arkin, Sheeley, 4.91M) reports that "in the last 14 days, according to data compiled by NBC News, coronavirus cases have declined to varying degrees in all 50 states, as well as in Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the Northern Mariana Islands." Puerto Rico and 10 states "saw a slight decrease between 10

and 25 percent. Forty states, plus the district and the Northern Mariana Islands, experienced a more significant decrease of 25 percent or more, according to the data."

Forbes (2/15, Reimann, 10.33M) reports "fewer than 65,000 new coronavirus cases were reported in the U.S. Monday, according to Johns Hopkins University – the lowest single-day case increase since Oct. 25, as major metrics point to a sharp decline in the American Covid-19 outbreak as experts remain divided over the exact reasons for the decline and what it might mean."

NPR (2/15, Diaz, 3.69M) reports "the seven-day average of new infections dropped below 100,000 on Friday, continuing at that level through Sunday, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center. Researchers reported 83,321 new infections and 3,361 new deaths Sunday."

NBC Nightly News (2/15, story 5, 2:05, Holt, 6.14M), the New York Daily News (2/14, Matthews, 2.51M), and CNN International (2/16, Maxouris) also covered the story.

7 Virus Variants Found In U.S. Carrying The Same Mutation.

The New York Times (2/14, Zimmer, 20.6M) reported "scientists are finding a number of new" coronavirus variants that originated in the US. In a study, "a team of researchers reported seven growing lineages of the novel coronavirus, spotted in states across the country. All of them have evolved a mutation in the same genetic letter." The study was posted on medRxiv.

Additional Sources. Forbes (2/15, Ray, 10.33M) reports similarly that "scientists have found seven separate but similar variants of the coronavirus that have emerged within the United States and appear [to] share a similar genetic mutation to more contagious U.K. and South African types, raising concerns that the U.S. may have to deal multiple variants of the virus that likely spread more easily." It is unclear "if their mutations – which are similar to the more contagious foreign variants – make either of the seven types more contagious, but scientists suspect this is likely the case." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci "told the New York Times Saturday that the variants were the 'big wild card' and warned if people failed to adhere to public health measures, those variants could 'take off on us.'"

The Hill (2/15, 5.69M) reports "the viruses also had mutations at the same part of their genes which determine how the virus enters human cells, which researchers told the Times could mean that the strains are more contagious in a manner similar to the strain blamed for the latest surge in cases in the U.K., though this hypothesis is unproven." CDC "Director Rochelle Walensky said in January that the U.K. variant had been detected in 26 U.S. states."

Also reporting on the story were ABC World News Tonight (2/15, story 3, 4:10, Muir, 7.84M) and the CBS Evening News (2/15, story 3, 2:50, Garrett, 4.75M).

Dr. Scott Atlas Slams 'Ludicrous' In-Person Safety Measures For Public Schools: 'We Are Off The Rails'.

Fox News (2/15, Halon, 23.99M) reports "Dr. Scott Atlas, a former special adviser to the Trump administration, warned public schools against embracing draconian safety measures as they move toward returning children to their classrooms amid the coronavirus pandemic." Atlas said, "This is completely ludicrous, not with the science at all. ... It is almost insane." Meanwhile, CDC Director "Rochelle Walensky confirmed that schools can reopen before teachers are vaccinated, but" NIAID Director "Anthony Fauci claimed that schools need the new COVID relief bill to pass in order to reopen safely."

First Known Patient Reinfected With South Africa Coronavirus Variant Is In Critical Condition.

The Washington Post (2/13, Kornfield, 10.52M) reported "a man in France is critically ill with the coronavirus variant first identified in South Africa four months after he was previously infected with the virus – the first recorded reinfection case involving the contagious mutation, according to his doctors." After facing "a mild infection in September, the 58-year-old man with a history of asthma was hospitalized last month and remains in critical condition, according to a paper shared Friday by the journal Clinical Infectious Diseases." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci is mentioned.

Nearly A Third Of US Adults Are Undecided About The Covid-19 Vaccine. Some Say Friends And Family Could Sway Them.

CNN (2/13, Holcombe, 89.21M) reported, "About 31% of adults say they plan to 'wait and see' how" the COVID-19 vaccine "works out for other people – and about two-thirds of that group say they may be persuaded to get one if they're convinced it would be highly effective in preventing illness, according to an analysis released Friday of a previous study by the Kaiser Family Foundation." Of this group, "61% said they'd be more likely to get vaccinated if they were persuaded that vaccinating most people would be the quickest way to return life to normal." According to the article, "to reach herd immunity, about 70% to 85% of Americans would need to be vaccinated, National Institute [of] Allergy and Infectious [Diseases] director Dr. Anthony Fauci has estimated."

Covid-19 Vaccine Hesitancy Is Splitting Dangerously Along Partisan Lines.

CNN (2/15, Enten, 89.21M) reports, "The ability to at least contain the coronavirus in America to the point that it is manageable as soon as possible will come down in large part to Americans' willingness to get vaccinated. The good news is that more and more Americans say they are willing to do so." However, "a partisan split on receiving a Covid-19 vaccine has reemerged and widened over the last few months." It could affect the country's "capacity to keep the virus at bay," and must "be continually addressed." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Biden Administration Delays Payment Cuts For Sore-Shoulder Injury Claims From Vaccines.

USA Today (2/12, Alltucker, 12.7M) reported, "The Biden administration has postponed a rule change that would eliminate compensation for the most common type of vaccine injury paid under a federal program." According to a notice posted on Friday by HHS, the Administration "will delay the rule until April 23 and seek more public input about any 'legal, factual, or policy issues raised by the underlying rule.'" The article mentioned former HHS Secretary Alex Azar and NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

The Superspreaders Behind Top COVID-19 Conspiracy Theories.

The AP (2/15, Klepper, Amiri, Dupuy) reports that as COVID-19 "spread across the globe, so too did speculation about its origins. Perhaps the virus escaped from a lab. Maybe it was engineered as a bioweapon." The article says, "The Associated Press collaborated with the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab on a nine-month investigation to identify the people and organizations behind some of the most viral misinformation about

the origins of the coronavirus." These people are known as "superspreaders." The piece goes on to discuss them, and adds that one of them "tweeted that Dr. Anthony Fauci created the coronavirus and that it was used as a bioweapon to reduce the world's population and undermine Trump."

'Too Many Shots, Not Enough Arms?' Public Health Pros See Vaccine Glut Ahead.

Inside Sources (2/12, Graham) reported, "public health experts say the looming crisis isn't a lack of" COVID-19 vaccine doses, "but a lack of arms to put them in." According to the article, "on Thursday, Dr. Anthony Fauci shocked NBC's Savannah Guthrie when he predicted 'open season' for vaccine access by April." Meanwhile, former FDA Commissioner Dr. Scott Gottlieb said, "At some point, perhaps in April, supply will start exceeding demand. The challenge won't be how to ration a scarce resource, but how to reach patients reluctant to get vaccinated."

Scientists Like Their Odds Against The Wily Coronavirus From South Africa.

The Los Angeles Times (2/12, Healy, 3.37M) reported "the coronavirus strain that took South Africa by storm with its uncanny ability to infect people who...had already been sickened with COVID-19 is now in California and at least three other states." The Times says, "Is another surge fueled by the South Africa strain inevitable here? Hardly. The evolving coronavirus may have plenty of tricks up its sleeve, but scientists say they do too." Increasing "evidence that several vaccines are less efficient at neutralizing the strain from South Africa is 'disturbing news,' but 'all is not lost,' said" NIAID Director Anthony Fauci. Vaccinations still suppress the coronavirus, he said.

Dr. Anthony Fauci: Scientist Or Political Monster?

In an opinion piece for the Washington Times (2/15, 626K), columnist Kelly Sadler says NIAID Director Anthony Fauci "said Sunday that President Biden's stimulus bill needs to be passed in order for the nation's schools to be able to reopen safely in the pandemic." Sadler writes, "This is not a scientific call – it's a political one – and not Dr. Fauci's to make." Sadler says "Fauci is a doctor, not a politician. He needs to stick to the science and steer clear of politics." Sadler concludes that "the Biden administration is brazenly politicizing the science, and Dr. Fauci and" CDC Director Rochelle "Walensky are all too willing to go to bat for them."

Biden's Follow-The-Science Mantra On School Meets Political Reality.

Politico (2/13, Cancryn, Pager, 6.73M) reported that President Biden vowed "his administration would lead with 'science and truth,' a continuation of a campaign message that he'd prioritize and elevate government scientists, in a sharp break from the Trump administration's pandemic response." However, almost "a month into Biden's presidency, the push to reopen schools is laying bare the thorny balancing act between science and politics. After promising to reopen schools by his 100th day in office, Biden's already walked back the pledge to just elementary and middle schools, and then, as White House press secretary Jen Psaki said this week, 'the majority of schools – so more than 50 percent.'" The article mentioned NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

America's Extra Vaccine Doses Could Be Key To Global Supply.

Axios (2/13, Lawler, 1.26M) reported, "The Biden administration's purchase of 200 million additional Pfizer and Modern doses means the U.S. could fully vaccinate 300 million people with just those two vaccines – and 355

million more people if four additional vaccines gain FDA approval." The US has some "250 million adults, many of whom won't elect to be vaccinated." The Administration has indicated it will donate excess vaccine doses to other countries, but has yet to unveil a plan. The article mentioned NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

How Scientists Saved Trump's FDA From Politics.

In an analysis, The Hill (2/16, Wilson, 5.69M) reports on how top scientists "helped guide" former FDA Commissioner Stephen "Hahn through a political tempest they feared could undermine a monumental scientific and medical achievement – one that is now resulting in more than 1.5 million people being vaccinated for COVID-19 every day." In interviews, "Hahn, senior administration officials and half a dozen of the nation's leading scientists who became members of Hahn's informal kitchen cabinet described the tense months leading up to the December decisions to authorize two promising [COVID-19] vaccine candidates." Former FDA Commissioner Peggy Hamburg said, "All of us were deeply concerned about making sure that the vaccine research development and review process could go forward as swiftly and smoothly as possible and that the integrity of the process wouldn't be compromised by political intrusions." Former HHS Secretary Alex Azar, Acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock, FDA's Peter Marks, and NIAID Director Anthony Fauci are mentioned.

Fauci Said He Worried About Getting COVID-19 While Working In The 'Superspreader' Trump White House.

Ashley Collman writes for Business Insider (2/15, 2.74M) that NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "told Axios that he was 'a little bit nervous' about catching the coronavirus during President Donald Trump's administration, since the White House at the time was 'sort of a superspreader location.'"

Additional Source. Talking Points Memo (2/15, 77K) also covers the story.

Piecing Together The Next Pandemic.

The New York Times (2/16, Zeeberg, 20.6M) profiles, "Dr. Jessica Manning, a public health researcher with the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, who had been working in Cambodia for years," who saw an opportunity to help "the country join the global effort to watch for new diseases." After a Chinese national arrived in Cambodia on January 23, 2021, bringing COVID-19 to the country, "Dr. Manning ran nasal and oral samples from the patient through a genetic sequencer." The article adds that her efforts "helped confirm the accuracy of the PCR test, and it revealed that only minor changes in the sequences were appearing. The virus did not seem to be mutating substantially – an indication that the disease would be easier to test for, treat and vaccinate against."

Biden Spoke About The COVID Vaccine At NIH And Kizzmekia Corbett Was There To Brief Him.

The Raleigh (NC) News & Observer (2/12, Sharpe, 396K) reported, "Kizzmekia Corbett has gained national attention for her work contributing to the development a coronavirus vaccine." Corbett, who is "an immunologist at the US National Institutes of Health, was lead scientist on the development of the Moderna vaccine." On Thursday, Corbett "gave President Joe Biden a tour of NIH's Viral Pathogenesis Laboratory that created the COVID-19 vaccine now manufactured by Moderna, The Associated Press reports."

Humidity In Face Masks May Offer Additional Protection From COVID-19.

Healio (2/15, Dreisbach, 40K) reports researchers found "the humidity created inside face masks may offer additional protection against COVID-19." NIH investigators Joseph M. Courtney and Adriaan Bax wrote, "We show that face masks strongly increase the effective humidity of inhaled air, thereby promoting hydration of the respiratory epithelium which is known to be beneficial to the immune system." Meanwhile, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases head Griffin Rodgers said, "This research supports the importance of mask wearing as a simple, yet effective, way to protect the people around us and to protect ourselves from respiratory infection, especially during these winter months, when susceptibility to these viruses increases." The findings were published in Biophysical Journal.

NCI-MATCH Trial Explores Tumor-Agnostic Approach.

Targeted Oncology (2/3, Vroomen Durning) reported "a tumor-agnostic approach in which treatment is developed based on a tumor's genetic and molecular features without regard to the cancer type or primary tumor location in the body is the focus of the National Cancer Institute (NCI)-MATCH trial." Investigators from NCI and the Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group-American College of Radiology Imaging Network (ECOG-ACRIN) Cancer Research Group "sought to determine whether therapy could be better targeted if oncologists could identify molecular alterations using next-generation sequencing (NGS) and administer currently available approved or experimental drugs – either singly or in combination – tailored to those targets." Lyndsay Harris, MD, acting associate director of the Cancer Diagnosis Program, Division of Cancer Treatment and Diagnosis at NCI, said, "The objective of this study was to determine whether matching drugs targeted against a specific gene abnormality would be effective in treating patients [with cancer] with that mutation, regardless of their tumor type."

Fecal Transplant Could Boost Immunotherapy To Treat Melanoma.

The Scientist (2/12, Williams, 157K) reported, "Results from a pair of small trials indicate that some patients with melanoma who don't initially show a response to one type of immunotherapy can see their tumors shrink if the drugs are paired with a fecal transplant from a donor who had improvement after the same cancer treatment." One trial "was based at Sheba Medical Center in Israel and includes the results of the first 10 patients enrolled; the other included 15 patients and was based at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC)." Both studies were published in Science. Giorgio Trinchieri of NIH's Center for Cancer Research said, "The field has been sort of confusing; we're still working a lot on that to try to really understand which bacterial species are important, and what is the mechanism."

Additional Source. Cancer Discovery (2/10) reported "fecal transplants can make immunotherapy-refractory melanomas sensitive to checkpoint blockade." Trinchieri, who is the chief of the NCI's Laboratory of Integrative Cancer Immunology, said, "The transplant induced a major and persistent change in the microbiota."

NCI Raises Paylines, Commemorates 50th Anniversary Of The National Cancer Act Of 1971.

Cancer Letter (2/12, Carolan, Ong) reported, "Pandemic notwithstanding, NCI is on track to reach the 15th percentile for the payline by 2025 – a goal set by institute Director Ned Sharpless in response to a deluge of grant applications." The support of Congress "'has allowed NCI to raise the payline for R01 research awards by

35% since 2019. For two consecutive years, we've raised grant paylines for [early-stage investigators] as well,' Sharpless said Feb. 11 in his director's report at a virtual meeting of the National Cancer Advisory Board."

The National Cancer Act At 50.

Cancer Discovery (2/8) reported that in 1971, "Congress passed the National Cancer Act, sweeping legislation that set the course for steady scientific progress in prevention, screening, diagnosis, and treatment." With the act "turning 50 this year, 'we really hope and expect that the entire cancer research community will embrace this anniversary and want to talk about it,' says Norman Sharpless, MD, the NCI's director." Partnering with people "in academia, industry, and philanthropy, the institute is planning social media campaigns throughout the year to tell the stories of pioneers who made seminal contributions in the cancer world."

AI Could Quicken Disease Diagnoses And Save Lives.

FedTech (2/15, Barrett) reports "federal scientists are working to improve patient care with...artificial intelligence." Dr. Les Folio, lead radiologist for computed tomography in the Radiology and Imaging Sciences department at the National Institutes of Health's Clinical Center, said that "once AI is applied to diagnostic imaging...human-driven AI workflows will provide checks and balances, with radiologists continuing to have the final say on the radiology report." Dr. Kris Kandarpa, director of research sciences and strategic directions at the National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering, said, "Images play a very big role in managing the disease." A "multi-institutional effort is training AI to identify and quantify the telltale 'ground glass' haze on more than 900 COVID-19 lung images from around the world," but "the Food and Drug Administration must approve its use before it can be used clinically."

NIH, FDA Sought Help From State To Get COVID Vaccines For Staff.

Medscape (2/12, Dooley Young, Subscription Publication, 219K) reported, "Two of the nation's top federal health agencies asked Maryland officials for help in bolstering their supplies of COVID-19 vaccines for their staff, underscoring the challenges of the vaccines' initial rollout." Maryland Governor Larry Hogan "said he is seeking a greater federal role in securing COVID-19 vaccines for the staff of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)." Furthermore, "separately, Maryland's congressional delegation on January 28 asked the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to help the NIH secure more COVID-19 vaccines." According to a letter from Maryland lawmakers, "the NIH was not among the five federal agencies equipped to provide vaccinations to their own workers." These "agencies include the Indian Health Service," among others.

Scientists Generate Detailed Map Of Glioblastoma Genes, Proteins, Infiltrating Cells And Signaling.

Genetic Engineering & Biotechnology News (2/12, 189K) reported, "A study led by researchers at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, Case Western Reserve University, and the National Cancer Institute (NCI), has revealed a detailed map of the genes, proteins, infiltrating cells and signaling pathways that play key roles in driving glioblastoma (GBM)." This "research forms part of the NCI's Clinical Proteomic Tumor Analysis Consortium (CPTAC)," and is published in Cancer Cell. Henry Rodriguez, director of the Office of Cancer Clinical Proteomics Research at the NCI, said, "What's

especially appealing about this study is the clustering of glioblastoma into four groups based on immune subtypes that emerged by combining proteomic and genomic comprehensive analysis."

Vitamin C, Zinc Don't Lessen Covid-19 Symptoms, Study Finds.

CNN (2/12, LaMotte, 89.21M) reported vitamin C and zinc can't help people "fight off COVID-19," even when taken "at high doses, according to the first randomized clinical trial to test the two supplements under medical supervision." In spite of "the popular use of vitamin C and zinc to fight off or lessen the severity of viral colds and flu, the new study, published Friday in JAMA Network Open, found the two supplements were of no benefit to people isolating at home with Covid-19." According to the NIH, "using vitamin C after cold symptoms start...doesn't appear to be helpful." CNN points out that "in 2009, the FDA warned the public against using zinc nasal sprays because they were linked to more than 100 cases of loss of smell."

Study Finds Subway Air Is Heavily Contaminated With Hazardous Pollutants.

The Washington Post (2/12, George, 10.52M) reported, "A study found that subway air is heavily polluted, exposing transit workers and riders to high concentrations of hazardous metals and harmful pollutants." The researchers "say subway air could make passengers and transit workers more susceptible to long-term illnesses such as asthma, lung cancer and heart disease." The study was "funded by a National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences grant and published in the Environmental Health Perspectives journal."

VCU's Rob Winn Reflects On A Year Of COVID, Racial Reckoning, And Being The Sole Black Director Of An NCI-Designated Cancer Center.

Cancer Letter (2/12) reported, "Being Black and running an NCI-designated cancer center at a time of a worldwide pandemic, an ugly election, and a racial reckoning in a Southern town puts you in a position to make profound observations." VCU Massey Cancer Center director Robert Winn said, "Would I have chosen a different path or a different year to be a cancer center director? There are days where I think it would have been much easier." According to Cancer Letter, "for the next couple of weeks, until March 1, when Adekunle 'Kunle' Odunsi becomes director of the University of Chicago Comprehensive Cancer Center, Winn will remain the only Black director of an NCI-designated cancer center."

Pharmacies Move To The Forefront Of The U.S. Vaccine Campaign.

The New York Times (2/12, Tumin, Rogers, LaFraniere, Weiland, 20.6M) reported a higher number of COVID-19 "vaccine shots will be given to Americans...with the start of a federal program that delivers doses directly to drugstores and grocery store pharmacies." This "program will start small, with one million" coronavirus "vaccine doses distributed to about 6,500 retail pharmacies," but "will expand to as many as 40,000 drugstores and groceries." The article mentioned comments President Biden made during a recent visit to the NIH.

Biden Says 'Almost Everybody' Could Have COVID-19 Vaccines By 'The End Of Summer'.

Fox News (2/12, Singman, 23.99M) reported that on Friday, President Biden said "it is his hope that by 'the end of summer almost everybody' will have received a COVID-19 vaccine." Biden recently "announced that the White House had secured another 200 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, saying on Thursday that the additional doses will be used to inoculate some 300 million people by the end of July." The article mentioned the NIH.

Additional Source. The New York Post (2/12, Bowden, 7.45M) also covered the story.

A Mysterious COVID Syndrome Still Stalks N.J.'s Kids. Doctors Remain On Alert As Cases Rise.

NJ News (2/14, Kent, 1.47M) reported that although the number of cases of multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C) "remains small, it continues to rise nearly a year after COVID-19's emergence in New Jersey." New Jersey officials "reported 88 cases of the pediatric syndrome as of Friday, affecting kids from infants to older teenagers." Physicians "remain on alert, knowing MIS-C can rapidly intensify and cause cardiac failure." NJ News added that Dr. Lawrence Kleinman, professor and vice-chair for academic development in Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School's department of pediatrics, "was recently awarded a $1.6 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to research which children are at the highest risk for developing severe COVID-19 illness."

ACTIV-2 Looks Beyond MAb Infusions With Four New Treatment Arms.

BioCentury (2/12, Golovin, Subscription Publication) reported, "The addition of four new treatment arms spanning diverse mechanisms to NIH's ACTIV-2 master protocol could give a broader picture of which therapeutic strategies will work in outpatient COVID-19." The new therapies "include an inhaled immune modulator, an IV and intramuscular mAb and a viral entry inhibitor." According to the article, "the new trial arms could provide more information than whether the individual therapies will be effective" and "help answer broader mechanistic questions including whether immune modulators are safe and effective in less severe cases of the disease, and whether intramuscular mAb injection is as effective as i.v. infusion."

Biden Grapples With Balancing Optimism And Tough Talk On Pandemic's Outlook.

CNN (2/13, Murray, Diamond, Christensen, 89.21M) reported as President Biden seeks "to take the opposite approach of former President Donald Trump on the coronavirus response, he's leaving most of the details to the scientists – including the tough talk about what Americans may have to brace for in the coming months." He "has opted for a more measured approach than his predecessor, showing up to promote vaccine announcements and appearing at a vaccine site or a laboratory, but mainly saving the hard questions for his closed-door daily briefing on the pandemic." The article mentioned the NIH.

Melania Trump Honors Valentine's Day With Heartwarming Message To Sick Children At National Institute Of Health.

The Washington Examiner (2/14, 888K) reported, "Former first lady Melania Trump paid tribute to children at The Children's Inn at the National Institute of Health in a Valentine's Day social media post." Trump said on Twitter, "On this #ValentinesDay, I think of the brave & inspirational children at @TheChildrensInn @NIH where I visited the past few years." She added, "Sending them love & strength, today & everyday. #HappyValentinesDay."

COVID-19 Virus Variants Are Evolving 'Escape' Mutations, And Immune-Compromised Patients Provide A Breeding Ground.

The Philadelphia Inquirer (2/12, McCullough) said "reports of patients who succumbed or barely survived worrisome new coronavirus strains – months before scientists were on the lookout for those particular strains –

have been published by researchers in Boston, London, and the National Institutes of Health." Such "patients all had severely weakened immune systems, long-running COVID-19 infections, and treatments intended to boost their immune response." For the coronavirus, "they were the perfect hosts for speeding up natural evolution and accumulating 'escape' mutations – DNA changes that would give the microbe a survival advantage and enable it to outcompete other variants if it started spreading in the community."

Biden To Tour Pfizer Vaccine Facility In Portage Next Week.

The Detroit News (2/12, Nann Burke, 1.16M) reported that according to the White House, President Biden "will visit Michigan on Thursday and tour the Pfizer manufacturing facility in Portage that's making doses of the company's COVID-19 vaccine." This visit "will mark Biden's first trip to Michigan as president, as the Delaware Democrat works to speed up distribution of the vaccine and push his $1.9 trillion recovery plan through Congress." The article mentioned the FDA and NIH.

Women Need To Be Equally Represented In NIH Study Sections.

In an opinion piece for STAT (2/15, 262K), Anna Volerman and Valerie Press, clinician-researchers and assistant professors of medicine, along with Vineet Arora, clinician-researcher and professor of medicine, write, "In research we published Monday in JAMA Network Open, we showed that women were less likely to be participants and chairs of NIH study sections than men." The authors add, "Women were also more likely to have temporary affiliations and serve on study sections with lower total funding or research grants awarded." The authors urge, "Because NIH study section reviewers make decisions that affect the entire country's health, they should reflect the U.S. population – both in terms of gender and race/ethnicity."

Schumer, Gillibrand Announce $1M In Grants For Cancer, Vision Research.

The Albany (NY) Times Union (2/12, Bryan, 315K) reported, "U.S. Senators Charles E. Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand on Friday announced $1,138,736 in federal funding for cancer research at Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo and for vision research at the Regenerative Research Foundation in Rensselaer." This "funding was allocated through grants from the National Cancer Institute and National Eye Institute."

Additional Sources. WIVB-TV Buffalo, NY (2/12, Siegal, 100K) reported Senator Gillibrand said, "Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo and the Regenerative Research Foundation in Rensselaer are developing breakthrough solutions in cancer detection and diagnosis and vision research. These world renowned institutes keep Upstate New York at the forefront of innovative research and I will always fight to ensure they have the funding needed to thrive." According to WIVB, "NCI and NEI are part of the National Institutes for Health (NIH), which is under the purview of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)."

WTEN-TV Albany, NY (2/12, Siegal, 58K) also reported.

Precision Medicine Program Analyzes Diverse Genetic Dataset.

Health IT Analytics (2/15, Kent) reports, "Researchers from the University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM) have analyzed diverse genetic datasets in an effort to advance precision medicine for minority populations." This "early analysis is part of a large-scale program funded by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), and examines one of the largest and most diverse datasets of high-quality whole genome sequencing – which makes up a person's DNA." The program seeks "to provide new insights into heart, lung,

blood, and sleep disorders and how these conditions impact people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, who are often underrepresented in genetic studies."

As Scientists Study Tattoo Ink Safety, Europe Bans Two Widely Used Pigments.

NPR (2/13, Greenfieldboyce, 3.69M) reported, "Tattoo artists in Europe are fighting a new ban on two commonly-used green and blue pigments, saying that losing these ink ingredients would be a disaster for their industry and their art." John Swierk, "a chemist at Binghamton University who just got a grant from the National Institutes of Health to study how the chemicals in tattoo inks can be changed by exposure to light," said, "The whole kind of picture, right down to what a tattoo actually looks like in the body, is still a surprisingly open research question." According to NPR, the FDA "has not regulated the pigments in tattoo inks so far, but agency officials will investigate and recall tattoo inks if they hear of a specific safety concern, like bacterial contamination that could lead to infections."

Health & Medical News

Biden To Extend Home Foreclosure Ban, Expand Mortgage Relief Program.

USA Today (2/16, Garrison, 12.7M) reports President "Biden is extending a ban on home foreclosures for federally backed mortgages by three months and expanding a mortgage relief program in a push to stabilize the nation's housing affordability crisis amid the COVID-19 pandemic." According to USA Today, "the foreclosure moratorium was set to expire March 31 and instead will be in place through June 30." The Administration on Tuesday will also "extend the enrollment window to request a mortgage payment forbearance – which allows borrowers to pause or reduce mortgage payments – until June 30. That program also was scheduled to end in March."

Biden Administration Consulting With Tech Giants To Improve COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.

Politico (2/16, Scola, Ravindranath, 6.73M) reports the Administration "is considering a new approach as it struggles with a messy vaccine rollout – setting aside [President Biden's] harsh criticisms of the tech industry and taking Silicon Valley up on its latest offers to help fight the pandemic." Amazon is offering "its expertise in IT and operations to help in vaccine distribution. Airbnb is suggesting it help create 'vaccine depots' using its vast network of real estate across the country. And Google is looking to give free ad space to public health authorities." The "potential boon to the vaccine effort" from these companies "is still large."

Millions Of Rapid COVID-19 Tests Purchased By Feds Remain Unused.

On its front page, the Wall Street Journal (2/15, A1, Abbott, Krouse, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports the federal government issued 142 million BinaxNOW rapid coronavirus tests beginning in September of last year, and as of early February, around 32 million had not been used. States and other organizations which did not use the tests cited concerns about accuracy and logistical problems.

US Employers Have Difficulty Filling Some Jobs Due To Ban On Foreign Workers Amid Pandemic.

On its front page, the Wall Street Journal (2/15, A1, Caldwell, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports as the US denied entry to nearly all foreign workers last year due to the COVID-19 restrictions and Trump Administration policies that reduced work visas, employers said businesses which rely on foreign workers had difficulty filling jobs despite high US unemployment.

Biden To Discuss Pandemic During Virtual G7 Meeting On Friday.

The AP (2/14, Jaffe) reported President Biden is scheduled to "speak at a virtual meeting of the world's major economies on Friday to discuss the coronavirus pandemic and global vaccination distribution, according to the White House." It is anticipated that Biden will "speak about the need for a global response to the pandemic and to recommit the U.S. to multilateral engagement, a stark contrast from President Donald Trump, who developed an isolationist foreign policy that saw the U.S. withdraw from major global agreements and alliances."

CNN (2/14, LeBlanc, 89.21M) reported that Biden will "specifically focus on areas, including 'coordination on vaccine production, distribution, and supplies, as well as continued efforts to mobilize and cooperate against the threat of emerging infectious diseases by building country capacity and establishing health security financing,' a White House statement released Sunday evening said."

Reuters (2/14, Mason) reported that the speech will be Biden's "first event with other leaders from the Group of Seven nations" since taking office.

Among other news outlets covering the story were the Wall Street Journal (2/14, Leary, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), The Hill (2/14, 5.69M) and the New York Post (2/15, Moore, 7.45M).

Experts Say Feds Need Targeted Messages To Encourage COVID-19 Vaccinations, Not National Campaigns.

USA Today (2/15, Weise, 12.7M) reports that if people have "been waiting for a big national campaign telling" them "COVID-19 vaccines are safe and everybody should get them," they should not hold their breath, because "until the supply is plentiful, the federal effort is largely focused on minority communities hesitant about the immunizations." The article says, "The kind of one-size-fits-all public service announcements that once blanketed the country won't work for COVID-19 vaccine." In this situation, "different communities need different messages and mass advertising doesn't necessarily make sense, said Hal Hershfield, a professor of behavioral decision making at the University of California, Los Angeles, Anderson School of Management."

Members Of US Public Health Service Still Awaiting Their Own COVID-19 Vaccines.

The Washington Post (2/13, Diamond, 10.52M) reported, "Hundreds of government health workers called on to help respond to the pandemic and potentially administer vaccines are still waiting for the opportunity to be vaccinated themselves, according to three officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity." The Post said "there is still no plan to allot vaccine supply to fully inoculate the commissioned corps of the U.S. Public Health Service, a 6,000-person force that has been deployed to care for coronavirus patients, set up vaccination sites and perform other health tasks on behalf of the federal government." Rather, corps personnel "have been encouraged to visit military treatment facilities such as Walter Reed National Military Medical Center – where some officers have been turned away, unable to convince staff they were eligible for the vaccine – or try to get shots in states where they've been deployed."

Poll Indicates 24% Of Americans Were Unable To Obtain COVID-19 Tests.

STAT (2/15, Silverman, 262K) reports almost 25% "of Americans say they wanted to get tested for the coronavirus but were unable to do so, according to the latest survey from STAT and The Harris Poll." Data show 24% of respondents said "they could not get tested for various reasons – a testing site was not nearby, the wait for a test was too long, transportation to a test site was unavailable, or it was unclear where to go for a test. Some people cited more than one of these hurdles." The wait was the most cited issue.

Pentagon Approves 20 More Teams To Help FEMA With COVID-19 Vaccinations.

The Hill (2/12, Mitchell, 5.69M) reported, "The Pentagon has approved 20 more military teams, a combined total of 4,700 service members, to help the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) administer COVID-19 vaccines across the country." After "last week's approval of five such teams, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin authorized an additional 20 to support FEMA at vaccination mega-sites and smaller locations, top Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters on Friday."

Black Americans In Tuskegee Afraid To Receive COVID-19 Vaccine Due To "Infamous" Syphilis Study.

NPR (2/16, Elliott, 3.69M) reports "a lingering mistrust of the medical system makes some Black Americans more hesitant to sign up for COVID-19 vaccines." Their "mistrust is rooted in history, including the infamous U.S. study of syphilis that left Black men in Tuskegee, Ala., to suffer from the disease." Today in Tuskegee, "that 20th century tragedy is still very relevant, according to nurse Cheryl Owens, who grew up in the town. She's been talking with friends and elderly relatives who say they're afraid to get the COVID-19 vaccine."

GOP Using Reopening Of Schools As Political Hammer Against Biden, Dems.

The New York Times (2/12, Hulse, 20.6M) reported, "When Senate Republicans sought recently to wall off some federal education aid from schools that decline to reopen once teachers can be vaccinated, a top Democrat accused them of staging a 'political show.' If it was, it was a show Republicans were more than happy to put on." Perceiving "a potent political opportunity amid parental angst across the country, leading congressional Republicans have begun to hammer relentlessly on President Biden, Democrats and teachers' unions to open schools quickly." These lawmakers contend that "doing so is a crucial and long overdue step to keep school-age Americans from falling too far behind amid the coronavirus pandemic."

Slavitt Says Everyone Should Be More Cautious As The UK Variant Spreads In The US.

On MSNBC Live (2/15, 232K), Andy Slavitt, White House senior adviser for the coronavirus response, discussed the UK coronavirus strain, saying, "I think we have to assume, as we do with everything" regarding "this virus that it's got a lot of surprises in store for us along the way. Those surprises have definitely included different strains. In this case, we have a more virulent strain, so I think we should be assuming that the next wave of case growth, to the extent that we have it, is gonna be with B.1.1.7, and that's something that I think everybody has to be even more cautious about."

Fox News (2/15, Rivas, 23.99M) also covers the interview.

Slavitt Says Biden Administration Believes There Will Be Enough COVID-19 Vaccines For All Americans By July.

On MSNBC's All In (2/12, 432K), Andy Slavitt, White House senior adviser for the coronavirus response, said, "I think one of the first things we learned when we got here was we hadn't secured enough vaccines for every American. So it was one of the first things the President instructed us to get out and do. And I think the good news is that we – he made that instruction, we had I think discussed we would probably be able to make those purchases to have enough vaccines for all adult Americans by the end of the summer. And today's news is not only that we have secured those purchases, but that we have been able to accelerate the time frame. And we believe we'll have enough vaccines for every American sometime in July."

Expert Says UK Variant May Make It Challenging For Schools To Reopen.

On CBS This Morning (2/15, 2.36M), Michael Osterholm, epidemiologist and director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, and a member of President Biden's transition COVID advisory team, discussed the CDC's recent guidelines for reopening schools. He said, "I think they are enough, particularly if you're looking at children from K to eighth grade. There we do see very little transmission between students or between students and teachers. When you get into the high school age, that's a bit of a different issue, but there really is a real red flag coming down the road, I think, and that is these variants that we're talking about, this particular one from the United Kingdom I think is going to cause such a surge in cases over the course of the next 14 weeks that I think a lot of schools will be challenged to open at all."

Kamala Harris Says Mass Exodus Of Women From US Workforce Amid Pandemic Is A "National Emergency."

Vice President Kamala D. Harris wrote in the Washington Post (2/12, 10.52M) that some "2.5 million women have lost their jobs or dropped out of the workforce during the pandemic. That's enough to fill 40 football stadiums. This mass exodus of women from the workforce is a national emergency, and it demands a national solution."

Commentary Says CDC's Guidelines For Reopening Schools Smack Of "Expediency."

Leana S. Wen, a physician, wrote in the Washington Post (2/13, 10.52M) that following "much anticipation, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday released a 35-page road map for returning to in-person schooling." While "there are some admirable parts of the new operational guidance, I worry that it could result in more confusion and increased distrust." Wen said "the right way to" reopen schools "isn't to forgo evidence-based, common-sense requirements. Doing so raises the same question that plagued the CDC under the Trump administration: Is it science or expediency that's driving its decisions? The Biden team has said they want to rebuild trust. These school reopening guidelines could do precisely the opposite."

Commentary: US Should Focus On Vaccinating As Many As Possible Quickly, Not On Who Gets Vaccinated.

Megan McArdle wrote in the Washington Post (2/14, 10.52M) that the US is "too often more obsessed with making sure that exactly the right people get vaccinated than we are about getting people vaccinated, period.

And unfortunately, some of the worst offenders are the people in charge of distributing the vaccines." She said especially given the growing number of coronavirus variants, the focus should be on vaccinating as many people as quickly as possible, rather than worrying about who gets vaccinated.

Commentary: Biden Administration Must Take Steps To Ensure Children Return To School This Fall.

Emily Oster, a professor of economics at Brown University and the organizer of the Covid-19 School Response Dashboard, wrote in the New York Times (2/12, 20.6M) that almost a year "into the pandemic, schools remain closed in many parts of the country. With so many teachers still waiting to be vaccinated, the question of whether to reopen has been the subject of passionate debate in cities like Chicago, where teachers just returned to classrooms after lengthy negotiations." Oster said the CDC recently unveiled guidelines for reopening schools, but the Biden "administration should take more steps to ensure that all children can attend school in person this fall."

Commentary Says US' COVID-19 "Vaccine Protocol Is Failing Miserably."

Suzette Hackney wrote in a commentary for USA Today (2/12, 12.7M) that based on "anecdotal evidence and social media chatter, it would appear that America's vaccination protocol is failing miserably and that we're willing to eat our own for a shot at immunization redemption. We aren't doing awful, but we certainly could be doing better." She concluded, "I feel such sympathy for those Americans who are eligible and want to receive the vaccination. Those roadblocks are frustrating. But this pandemic has taught us that steeled patience is a requirement. We will get there; we must."

Commentary Slams Biden's School Reopening Goal.

Rich Lowry, editor of National of National Review, wrote in the Boston Herald (2/13, 327K) that the Biden Administration's goal of reopening schools "isn't really having more than half of schools open – it's having more than half of schools still 80% closed." He added, "Not only is this a ridiculous standard, schools have already cleared the bar. According to Burbio, which runs a school-opening tracker, about two-thirds of K-12 students are attending in-person or hybrid schools."

Commentary Says "Political Pressures" Influenced CDC's Guidelines On School Reopening.

Robert VerBruggen wrote in National Review (2/14, 798K) that recently, he "pointed out that the excuses for keeping schools closed are crumbling." VerBruggen said he also pointed to "a bizarre instance in which the CDC's director had said schools could reopen safely before teachers are vaccinated...only to have the administration later backtrack, claiming she was speaking in her 'personal' capacity. At a White House briefing." He added that the CDC "has released its full guidelines for schools, and it seems the political pressures won out over the science."

Louisiana To Begin Enforcing Mask Requirement For Almost All Ferry Passengers.

The AP (2/14) reported "Louisiana's transportation department said it" planned to "start enforcing a mask requirement Monday for nearly all passengers on the state's ferries in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19."

The department "said the mask mandate follows the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention requirement issued last month that called for people to wear face coverings on public transportation." Passengers who remain "in their vehicles with the windows raised on Louisiana's ferries will have an exemption from the face covering requirement."

Connecticut Governor Credits Vaccinations With Drop In COVID-19 Infection Rate.

The AP (2/12) reported Gov. Ned Lamont (D) "credited the growing number of vaccinations in Connecticut with the state's declining rate of COVID-19 infection, noting Friday the number of nursing home residents and people 75 years and older who are getting infected is 'way down.'" Based on "data through Feb. 11 from Johns Hopkins University, the rolling average number of daily new cases in the state has dropped by slightly more than 630, a decrease of 34%." Lamont said, "It's making a difference in the terms of we've got everybody in our nursing homes vaccinated and the number of complications coming out of our nursing homes is way down."

Officials In Kenosha County, Wisconsin Cracking Down On Illinois Residents Crossing Border To Receive COVID-19 Vaccine.

The AP (2/13) reported officials in Kenosha County, Wisconsin "say they are cracking down on Illinois residents who are crossing the border to get the COVID-19 vaccine in Wisconsin." In a statement, "Kenosha Health Officer Jen Freiheit said...vaccination clinics are for people who live or work in Kenosha County who are age 65 and over or in the 1A category." Freiheit said, "We are trying our best to discourage non-residents and some might have slipped through, but we are working to crack down on that going forward."

Georgia Lawmakers Considering Legislation Requiring Hospitals, Nursing Homes To Allow Visitors Amid Pandemic.

The AP (2/13, Nadler) reported legislators "in Georgia's state House are considering legislation that would require hospitals and nursing homes to allow visitors, after many cut visitor access because of the coronavirus pandemic." The legislation "would require that hospitals, nursing homes and other long-term care facilities allow patients to have two visitors for up to two hours per day." The measure "would only be applicable to patients that are in a facility for more than 24 hours, and the facilities would be able to set requirements for visitors, such as a mask or testing requirement."

Ohio Governor Rebukes School Officials For Backtracking On In-Person Learning Commitments.

The AP (2/12, Franko) reported Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine (R) "on Friday publicly rebuked school officials in Akron and Cincinnati for backtracking on commitments they'd made to offer in-person learning by March 1, calling that unacceptable after employees in those districts were among those prioritized for coronavirus vaccines because of their reopening promises." DeWine "was upset to learn that Akron students weren't slated to return until mid-March, and that Cincinnati's Walnut Hills High School was sticking with remote learning over concerns about crowding and the ability to keep students socially distanced." DeWine "said he isn't telling schools or parents what to do, but is warning schools that made reopening commitments in exchange for getting prioritized vaccines to live up to their word."

Connecticut Officials Aim To Address Racial Gap In COVID-19 Vaccinations.

The AP (2/12, Haigh, Collins) reported on "the challenges facing officials in Bridgeport and other urban areas around Connecticut and the country as they try to address a racial gap in COVID-19 vaccinations, with Black and Latino people lagging behind white people in receiving the shots." Although state and local authorities in Connecticut "have announced a series of actions over the past week to address the gap, some political officials and community activists say not enough is being done to reach out to community members to tell them where they can get vaccinated and to educate them about the vaccine." State and local officials "say they're using public education campaigns to battle myths and skepticism about the vaccines within the African American and Hispanic communities, which stem from a longstanding mistrust of medical systems."

Iowa Officials Change Decision To Withhold COVID-19 Vaccines From Certain Counties.

The AP (2/15) reports "Iowa health officials have modified a decision to withhold COVID-19 vaccines from some counties that were reported as not having used up to 80% of their allocation last week after working with the counties to resolve the problem." Iowa's public health department "informed five counties on Friday that it would withhold this week's allotment of vaccine." However, "as of Monday afternoon, the Iowa Department of Public Health said the counties would be getting their allotment of vaccines after negotiating an agreement to solve the issues that led to lagging vaccine use, the Des Moines Register reported."

Several COVID-19 Vaccination Sites To Reopen Tuesday In Los Angeles.

The Los Angeles Times (2/15, Ryan, 3.37M) reports "Dodger Stadium and several other COVID-19 vaccination sites that were shuttered last week due to shortages are set to reopen Tuesday, though continuing supply problems mean the vast majority of shots administered will be second doses, Los Angeles officials said." People who were "vaccinated in mid-January were automatically slotted into appointments for most of the city's anticipated weekly supply of 54,000 Moderna doses and 4,000 Pfizer doses, a prioritization that the city said complied with directives by county and federal health officials." Only "4,600 doses will be set aside for initial immunizations and will be administered at Pierce College and at mobile clinics in hard-hit sections of South and East L.A."

Healthcare Systems In Minnesota Start COVID-19 Vaccination Outreach Programs For Hard-Hit Communities.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune (2/12, Howatt, 855K) reported "some Minnesota health care systems have begun COVID-19 vaccination outreach programs to communities that have been hit the hardest by the pandemic." For example, "last weekend, M Health Fairview started its COVID-19 vaccination outreach, building on a 15-year-old initiative to partner with community organizations to give free, no-barrier immunizations." The healthcare systems' "efforts come as there is growing awareness that racial and ethnic minorities are being vaccinated at lower rates, based on reports from states that do collect that information."

Plan To Vaccinate More Massachusetts Seniors Against COVID-19 Sparks Concerns.

The Washington Times (2/15, Howell, 626K) reports "Massachusetts is rolling out a plan to get more of its seniors vaccinated for COVID-19 -- a caregiver who brings someone 75 and older to mass-vaccination sites like

Fenway Park can get their own shot during the visit." It is "a creative way to help older adults navigate unfamiliar settings, as the state tries to" speed up "a rollout that's given first doses to about 12% of residents." However, it has "sparked concerns that other older adults will be bumped farther back in line, especially as younger, healthy people attempt to enlist senior companions through online posts."

Kansas Attempting To Fix System For Sending COVID-19 Vaccine Information To US Government.

The AP (2/15, Hollingsworth) reports "Kansas is working to fix its troubled system for sending vaccine data to the federal government, saying glitches caused about 100,000 doses that were given to not be registered as being administered." Gov. Laura Kelly (D) "said in her biweekly conference call with elected officials last week that part of the problem is with the system that the state uses to track vaccinations, which is called Kansas WebIZ." Kelly said, "That system then needs to send that information to the CDC and there have been some glitches really all along the path. ... We are bringing in the vendor who put WebIZ together to work on the technical fixes that need to be in place to smooth out that process."

The Hill (2/15, Lonas, 5.69M) reports Kansas' system will not "recognize that a vaccine has been administered if one facility gives another facility doses of the vaccine they need to carry out scheduled vaccinations." Furthermore, it "won't register a vaccine has been administered if one field in the state system is left blank since it causes the [Centers] for Disease Control and Prevention not to receive the data, officials said."

Virginia ICUs Hitting Full Capacity Despite Stabilizing Number Of Hospitalizations.

The Richmond (VA) Times-Dispatch (2/13, Moreno, 401K) reported that in Virginia, COVID-19 "cases are declining. Overall hospitalizations have stabilized. Yet 20 intensive care units in Virginia recently had no available beds," and 13 "hit at least 90% capacity." Of the 13, four "maxed out, according to federal data collected from Jan. 29 through Feb. 4." One ICU "reached 107%, down from a haunting extreme that spiked Sentara Obici to 148% barely a month ago."

Editorial Criticizes US Supreme Court's Ruling On California's COVID-19 Restrictions For Places Of Worship.

In an editorial, the San Francisco Chronicle (2/14, 2.44M) said that "just when most of the federal government had returned to the tedious but necessary work of responsibly managing a deadly pandemic, the U.S. Supreme Court emerged to carry on the tradition of counterproductive demagoguery that is falling out of favor in the other branches." The Supreme Court's "right wing recently intervened to protect religious Californians' right to contract and transmit the coronavirus." The high "court ruled late on a Friday that the faithful must be allowed to resume congregating inside regardless of the danger to their earthly lives or those of their neighbors." The Chronicle said "any religious leaders refusing to abide" by COVID-19 "restrictions for a few more months while vaccinations proceed betray a disregard for their fellow humans that is at odds with the values their faiths espouse."

Beaumont Health Cancels Over 1,800 COVID-19 Vaccination Appointments Due To Reduction In Allocation From Michigan.

The Detroit Free Press (2/15, Shamus, 2.16M) reports "Beaumont Health says it is canceling 1,884 appointments this week for patients who were scheduled to get the second booster dose of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines." The

reasons is "an unexpected and significant reduction in Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine allocation from the state of Michigan," the health system said. The health system "said it is emailing patients to let them know their appointments have been canceled, but also will attempt to contact patients without an email address by phone."

The Detroit News (2/15, Kozlowski, 1.16M) also reports on the story.

Child Care Workers Now Prioritized For COVID-19 Vaccine In Kentucky.

The Louisville (KY) Courier-Journal (2/15, Yetter, Ladd, 554K) reports "Kentucky's child care workers are being prioritized for the COVID-19 vaccine, following an appeal from multiple advocacy, business and education groups." Gov. Andy Beshear (D) "announced Monday that child care workers will be added to the current 'Phase 1B' group for vaccination. That group already includes teachers and other school workers, who began getting the vaccine in January."

Blue Shield Of California Secures Contract To Boost COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution.

The Los Angeles Times (2/15, Gutierrez, 3.37M) reports Blue Shield of California "will create an algorithm to determine where to allocate COVID-19 vaccines statewide with the goal of being able to administer 3 million shots a week by March 1, according to a contract made public Monday that grants the insurance giant far-reaching powers in overseeing the state's distribution of doses." The Times says the company "will attempt to drastically scale up the number of daily doses, but that goal will largely depend on the supply sent to the state."

Pennsylvania's Data On Ethnicity, Race In COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Reportedly Lacking.

The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review (2/14, Simonton, 245K) reported that "despite numerous studies predicting the likelihood of racial disparities and a supposed focus on equity in the rollout, Pennsylvania's data tracking race and ethnicity in [COVID-19] vaccine distribution currently is lacking." Over one "month into the state's vaccine rollout, about 34% of race data as it relates to distribution is marked as 'unknown' on the state's dashboard." The Tribune-Review said "fewer than 12,000 Black residents have been vaccinated partially, compared to almost 413,000 white residents. But more than 228,000 people have no race identified at all, according to the dashboard."

Connecticut Teachers Push For School Employees To Be Prioritized In COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.

The Hartford (CT) Courant (2/13, Blanco, Brindley, 438K) reported that "as Connecticut continues to expand COVID-19 vaccinations to more residents, teachers are pushing for school staff to be at the front of the line, saying that vaccinating educators is a crucial step toward keeping schools open and safe." However, "new school reopening guidance released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention places a priority not on vaccination, but on existing strategies such as masking, hand washing and social distancing." AFT Connecticut President Jan Hochadel "said the Board of Education Union Coalition is proposing to the state that a certain percentage of Connecticut's overall available vaccines each week go towards school staff members in a 'parallel track, so that we can ensure that many educators are going to be vaccinated as we start going forward with the essential employees.'"

Rhode Island Lieutenant Governor "Not Satisfied" With State's COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.

The Providence (RI) Journal (2/15, Anderson, 376K) reports that on Monday, Rhode Island "Lt. Gov. Dan McKee broke ranks with Gov. Gina Raimondo, saying that he is 'not satisfied' with the state [COVID-19] vaccine rollout he is set to inherit when she is confirmed as U.S. Commerce Secretary as early as next week." McKee said, "Like most Rhode Islanders, I am not satisfied with the current administration's progress on vaccine distribution, especially as we see our neighbors in Connecticut ranked among the top in the nation." McKee added, "When I become Governor, I want to have all the information to be able to hit the ground running on day one."

Commentary Discusses How To Ensure Communities Of Color Receive COVID-19 Vaccines.

In an opinion piece for Scientific American (2/13, 3.1M), Gary Velasquez, co-founder and CEO of Cogitativo, a data science company, said "President Biden's promise to ensure that communities of color are not left behind in the vaccine rollout shows that he is ready to tackle the pervasive inequities of health care laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic." In order to turn "that promise into practice," Velasquez said, "we first need to know where those at high risk within underserved communities are located in order to set up mobile vaccination sites in the right places, and that will require the federal government to use a scientific, data-driven system for identifying those most in need." Velasquez called for the US "to unlock the power of science and data to surgically identify individuals in communities of color who are most at risk and ensure the vaccine reaches them first."

Governors Urge Biden To Give Them More Say In How Feds Distribute COVID-19 Vaccines.

USA Today (2/15, Groppe, 12.7M) reports "governors are asking President Joe Biden for more say in how the federal government is distributing coronavirus vaccines to local pharmacies and community health centers in their states." The governors "also want the public to better understand which distribution programs states are running and which ones the federal government controls." The executive committee of the National Governors Association wrote to Biden, "Due to the anxiety created by the demand and supply of the vaccine, it is imperative that the American people fully understand the process."

Opinion: California Must Create COVID-19 Vaccination Plan For ICE Facilities.

In an opinion piece for the Los Angeles Times (2/15, 3.37M), Bill Ong Hing, founder of the Immigrant Legal Resource Center in San Francisco, and Hamid Yazdan Panah, advocacy director for Immigration Defense Advocates, write that "perhaps no population has been more marginalized in the" COVID-19 vaccine "rollout than those who are held against their will in immigration detention facilities." Almost one "year into the pandemic, there is still no known plan in place and no agency or group clearly responsible for making sure that immigrants in detention in the state will get vaccinated." The authors say, "As California works to reorganize and improve its overall vaccination rate, it must include a specific plan that recognizes the urgency of the COVID crisis in ICE detention."

UK Coronavirus Variant Detected In New Hampshire For First Time.

The AP (2/12, Ramer) reported the UK "coronavirus variant has been detected in a New Hampshire resident for the first time, state health officials said Friday." A Hillsborough County adult "tested positive for the variant." The

individual "had close contact with someone who had been diagnosed with COVID-19 after international travel, according to the Department of Health and Human Services."

University Of Central Florida Student Contracts UK Coronavirus Variant.

The AP (2/12) reported "a student at the University of Central Florida has been diagnosed with a variant of the coronavirus first found in the United Kingdom and thought to be more easily transmissible." The "student tested positive this week, Michael Deichen, associate vice president of UCF Student Health Services said Thursday in a statement on the university's website."

New York's COVID-19 Seven-Day Positivity Rate Reaches Lowest Mark Since End Of November.

The New York Daily News (2/13, McShane, 2.51M) reported Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) "delivered New Yorkers a pre-Valentine's Day gift better than chocolate or flowers: The state's COVID-19 seven-day positivity rate hit its lowest mark since late November." The positivity "rate dropped below 4% for the first time since Nov. 29 and the seven-day average was down 51% from the post-holiday peak of early January, the governor said Saturday."

Los Angeles County Seeing Drop In COVID-19 Cases.

The Los Angeles Times (2/14, Elmahrek, 3.37M) reported "Los Angeles County's daily number of coronavirus cases continued to decline Sunday, bolstering hopes that the number of new cases will wane as spring approaches and vaccinations ramp up." Los Angeles County "reported 1,936 new coronavirus cases and 82 related deaths, comparatively low numbers that may in part reflect weekend reporting delays, according to the county Public Health Department." According to the Times, "the daily case counts over the last week – an average of fewer than 3,500 new infections a day – [show] a dramatic decline since the peak of the pandemic in early January, when the average number of new daily cases reached 15,100."

Navy Says Three Sailors Aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt Tested Positive For COVID-19.

The Washington Post (2/15, Lamothe, 10.52M) reports three sailors on the USS Theodore Roosevelt "have tested positive for the coronavirus, Navy officials said Monday, marking the second outbreak at sea on the ship within a year." In a statement, the Navy revealed the sailors on the aircraft carrier "were not experiencing any symptoms and are isolated aboard the ship along with people they have been in close contact with," and "none of the people in close contact had tested positive, the service said."

The AP (2/15, Baldor) reports that "in a statement, the Navy said it is 'following an aggressive mitigation strategy,' including masks, social distancing, and proper handwashing and hygiene measures."

Texas Health Officials Warn Of "Rapid Growth" Of UK COVID-19 Variant.

The Dallas Morning News (2/13, Kuchment, 772K) reported the Texas Department of State Health Services "says it is seeing 'rapid growth' in new cases of a highly contagious coronavirus variant that was first detected in the United Kingdom." The agency "recorded 45 cases of the variant, known as B.1.1.7, as of Friday," and researchers last week "reported Texas' first two cases of the South African variant, which is both highly contagious and more likely than other strains to dodge the human immune system."

Second Case Of UK Coronavirus Variant Found In Kansas.

The AP (2/15) reports "a second case of" the UK "coronavirus variant has been confirmed in Kansas, state health officials said Monday." The variant "was found in the Wichita area, the state Department of Health and Environment said in a news release." The individual "with the second confirmed case likely contracted it while traveling out of state, the health department said. No further details about the person were released."

Connecticut Confirms First Case Of South Africa COVID-19 Variant.

The Connecticut Mirror (2/15, Pazniokas) reports "Connecticut's first confirmed case of a relatively rare and more contagious variant of COVID-19 originally detected in South Africa involves a Fairfield County resident with no recent history of travel, state officials said Monday." The infected individual, "who is described only as between ages 60 and 70, is hospitalized in New York and doing well, officials said."

UK Coronavirus Variant Likely 30-70% More Deadly, Study Suggests.

The Washington Post (2/13, Berger, 10.52M) reported scientists say the UK coronavirus "variant is probably 30 to 70 percent more deadly, based on a follow-up study by the government released Friday that assessed a larger sample size of covid-19 patients and also found a higher rate of hospitalization." The UK "variant is 'associated with an increased risk of hospitalization and death compared to infection with' other forms of the virus, according to the study, which drew from multiple databases across the country."

The New York Times (2/13, Mueller, Zimmer, 20.6M) reported "the British government did not publicly announce the updated findings, which are based on roughly twice as many studies as its earlier assessment and include more deaths from Covid-19 cases caused by the new variant, known as B.1.1.7." Overall, "the government scientists' assessment that the variant was 'likely' to be linked to a higher risk of death still only signaled 55 to 75 percent confidence in the finding."

Forbes (2/15, 10.33M) contributor Robert Glatter says "the new research complied data and studies from multiple institutions and found 'increased severity' of Covid-19 cases compared to non-variants." The study also "noted that B.1.1.7 cases were 30-70% more lethal in comparison to the original wild-type strains."

Fox News (2/15, Aaro, 23.99M) reports "the scientists noted several limitations within their assessment, including that the number of deaths [is] 'too low for reliable interference,' and that the consensus of the findings was not unanimous."

Also reporting on the story were The Hill (2/13, Lonas, 5.69M) and the New York Post (2/15, Steinbuch, 7.45M).

HHS To Extend Liability Protections Amid COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.

Inside Health Policy (2/12, Wang, Subscription Publication) reported "HHS will extend liability protections under the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act to any federal government employee, contractor or volunteer who prescribes, administers, delivers, distributes or dispenses a covered countermeasure, including COVID-19 vaccines, the department announced Friday."

Novavax To Complete US Vaccine Trial Enrollment In Record Time.

The Financial Times (2/15, Kuchler, Subscription Publication, 1.48M) reports, "Novavax, one of the unexpected success stories of the Covid-19 vaccine race, is about to finish enrolling its US trial in record time."

Pfizer Confident It Can Deliver 2B COVID-19 Vaccine Doses This Year As Company Ramps Up Capacity, Executive Says.

In an interview with the AP (2/14, Johnson), Pfizer global supply head Mike McDermott said Pfizer is "confident" in its commitment to deliver "approximately 2 billion doses of the COVID-19 vaccine by the end of 2021," and the company is "constantly looking for ways to make and distribute more doses faster." He added that Pfizer is expanding its "capacity to make more vaccine as quickly as possible. We are making process improvements, adding more manufacturing lines within the Pfizer and BioNTech facilities, expanding use of contract manufacturers and adding more suppliers."

The Hill (2/14, Coleman, 5.69M) reported, "McDermott said Pfizer's construction of the virus's messenger RNA genetic code is 'the perfect science to be able to make modifications quickly' if needed."

HuffPost (2/14, Visser, 363K) also covered the story.

Pfizer Vaccine Proves Effective In Israel.

Reuters (2/14, Rabinovitch, Lubell) reported Clalit, Israel's largest healthcare provider, announced Sunday that there was "a 94% drop in symptomatic COVID-19 infections among 600,000 people who received two doses of the Pfizer vaccine in the country's biggest study to date," and "said the same group was also 92% less likely to develop severe illness from the virus."

The Wall Street Journal (2/15, Lieber, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) also reports on the story.

US Hits Milestone With 50M COVID-19 Vaccine Doses Administered.

On NBC Nightly News (2/14, story 5, 2:30, Díaz-Balart, 3.89M), Meagan Fitzgerald reported that on Friday, the US posted "a single-day record of more than two million [COVID-19] shots."

On the CBS Weekend News (2/14, story 3, 2:20, 8.27M), Jericka Duncan reported, "The race to vaccinate America is accelerating and hit a new milestone this weekend: 50 million shots, with 37 million people receiving their first dose, 13 million getting their second dose." However, Lilia Luciano added that in California, "the shortage of vaccines has led to closures, to postponed appointments, and to widespread frustration." According to Luciano, officials in Los Angeles "say they could give 600,000 doses a week if they had the supply."

The Wall Street Journal (2/14, Wernau, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) said that aside from the supply issues, the challenges that come with distributing the vaccines are daunting.

Walmart Starts Large-Scale Vaccine Distribution.

The Wall Street Journal (2/14, Nassauer, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reported Walmart is positioned to become one of the largest distributors of the coronavirus vaccine because of its large network of stores. Starting last week, 21 retail chains began distributing vaccines, among them CVS, Walgreens, and Kroger. The federal government intends to distribute roughly one million doses weekly to the chains.

FDA Allows Moderna To Increase Quantity Of Its COVID-19 Vaccine In Each Vial.

The New York Times (2/12, LaFraniere, Weiland, Stolberg, 20.6M) reported that the FDA "has informed the drugmaker Moderna that it can put up to 40 percent more coronavirus vaccine into each of its vials, a simple and potentially rapid way to bolster strained supplies, according to people familiar with the company's operations." Although "federal officials want Moderna to submit more data showing the switch would not compromise vaccine quality, the continuing discussions are a hopeful sign that the nation's vaccine stock could increase faster than expected, simply by allowing the company to load up to 14 doses in each vial instead of 10."

Also reporting were The Hill (2/12, Kelley, 5.69M), Fox News (2/12, Best, 23.99M), and Politico (2/12, Lim, Owermohle, 6.73M).

Possibly Thousands Of Foreign Nationals Have Received COVID-19 Vaccine In US.

The Washington Post (2/12, Bernstein, Sheridan, 10.52M) reported that potentially thousands of foreign nationals have received coronavirus vaccines in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention "has yet to tackle the issue of foreign nationals getting vaccinated." The article added that the CDC "did not address the issue of Americans crossing state lines for shots until Monday, when it told states they could restrict coronavirus vaccinations to their residents."

Sanofi CEO Admits COVID-19 Vaccine "Will Not Be Ready This Year."

Reuters (2/13, Blamont) reported Sanofi CEO Paul Hudson has told a French newspaper that its COVID-19 vaccine candidate with Translate Bio "will not be ready this year." However, according to the article, clinical trials of the mRNA-based vaccine "are expected to start this quarter." The revelation "could mark another blow for Sanofi, already embattled with a delay for another COVID-19 vaccine candidate it hopes to bring to patients and for which the company has teamed up with Britain's GlaxoSmithKline."

The Hill (2/13, Williams, 5.69M) reported Hudson said the vaccine "could be of use at a later stage all the more if the fight against variants was to continue." Sanofi hopes "to begin a phase 2b trial of this vaccine this month, a move that will delay its availability to sometime in the second half of 2021."

Among other outlets reporting were Bloomberg (2/14, Loh, 3.57M), a separate Bloomberg (2/14, Katz, 3.57M) article, and The Hill (2/13, Lonas, 5.69M).

AstraZeneca, Oxford University Start Testing COVID-19 Vaccine In Children.

The Washington Post (2/14, Bellware, 10.52M) reported, "Oxford University announced Friday it started testing its coronavirus vaccine in children as young as 6 in a move that expands coronavirus vaccine trials to the youngest age group yet." This new "trial will include 300 child volunteers ages 6 to 17, with 240 of them receiving the vaccine co-developed with drugmaker AstraZeneca; the remaining participants will receive a control meningitis vaccine that has been proved safe in children but is expected to mimic side effects of a covid-19 shot, the university said in a statement."

The Hill (2/13, Castronuovo, 5.69M) reported, "Thus far, coronavirus vaccines have largely been tested and approved by countries for emergency use for people as young as 16, though Pfizer and Moderna currently have clinical trials underway to determine the safety and efficacy of vaccinations among children."

Among other sources covering the story were Bloomberg (2/13, Ring, 3.57M), CBS News (2/14, Lewis, 5.39M), Newsweek (2/13, Cole, 2.67M), and the New York Post (2/13, Connelly, 7.45M).

Physicians Aiming To Combat Anti-Vaccine Misinformation.

Politico (2/15, Ravindranath, 6.73M) reports physicians and nurses "trying to build confidence in Covid-19 vaccines on social media are mounting coordinated campaigns to combat anti-vaccination forces prevalent on those platforms," and public health groups "are mobilizing a global network of vaccine advocates to come to their aid when they are attacked online by activists, who closely monitor certain hashtags and keywords." According to the article, the groups are using "monitoring software to swiftly identify online attacks, then tap their networks to flood social media posts with supportive messages countering vaccine opponents."

Despite Initial Promises, Most Of Moderna's COVID-19 Vaccine Doses Sold Only To Rich Countries.

The Washington Post (2/13, Rauhala, 10.52M) reported that despite Moderna agreeing to uphold "equitable access principles" for its COVID-19 vaccine, the company's "vaccine is anything but accessible," with most of the early doses being sold only to rich countries and poorer countries being "almost entirely shut out."

Men Accused Of Creating Fake Site To Sell COVID-19 Vaccines.

The New York Times (2/12, León, 20.6M) reported, "Three Baltimore men have been accused by federal prosecutors of putting up a fake website to sell Covid-19 vaccines for $30 a dose, prosecutors say." The men "each face a charge of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Maryland said on Thursday." The men allegedly "created a website that resembled that of Moderna, the biotechnology company based in Cambridge, Mass., that in December won federal approval to distribute its Covid-19 vaccine."

Black Americans Reportedly Disadvantaged By COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout That Prioritizes Those Over 75.

ProPublica (2/12, Thomas, 235K) reported, "Prioritizing COVID-19 vaccinations for people 75 and up can leave out Black Americans, who tend to die younger than their white counterparts." The article highlighted the situation in majority-Black Shelby County, where "22% of Shelby County vaccine recipients are Black, compared to 43% who are white" as of February 6. According to the article, "experts attribute the vaccination disparity to a number of factors, including poor internet access, lack of transportation and distrust of the medical system caused by racist practices such as the federal government's Tuskegee syphilis study."

MSU Researcher Tests Cannabis-Based Drug To Fight COVID-19.

The Lansing (MI) State Journal (2/15, Johnson, 185K) reports that "parts of the marijuana plant could be a key to treating one of COVID-19's deadly symptoms." The immune system responds when "exposed to COVID-19, but sometimes so aggressively it affects lung function and makes it harder to breathe." That's where a new drug "containing cannabinoids...comes in." Norbert Kaminski, a Michigan State University professor of pharmacology and toxicology, "is working with GB Sciences, a biopharmaceutical company, to develop a drug that prevents the lung inflammation that some experience after contracting COVID-19 that can lead to trouble breathing and death."

Child Care Workers Reportedly Being Left Behind In COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.

Vox (2/15, North, 1.88M) reports that around the country, child care providers "have been working in-person throughout the pandemic, caring for kids even when schools are closed." However, in many cases, the vaccine rollout is "leaving them behind." Even in states where child care workers "have been prioritized alongside teachers, like California, a chaotic process has meant many have yet to receive the shot." Advocates "fear that a combination of long work hours, complex sign-up processes, and lack of sufficient outreach in languages other than English will mean that the child care workforce – disproportionately composed of women of color and immigrants – will struggle to access vaccines even when they're technically eligible to get them." Child Care Providers United Executive Director Alexa Frankenberg told Vox, "There has to be a strategy that really acknowledges who these workers are, what their work looks like, and meets them where they are."

HIV Activists Fought For Inclusion In COVID-19 Vaccine Trials.

ABC News (2/15, Chhabravia, 2.44M) reports, "Hundreds of HIV-positive people" are "participating in clinical trials for COVID-19 vaccines." According to the article, "people with HIV were initially excluded from COVID-19 vaccine trials – as well as people undergoing cancer treatment, or anyone else with a compromised immune system." However, activists argued against the exclusion of people living with HIV from trials launched by pharmaceutical companies Pfizer and Moderna back in July.

Residents At One West Virginia Nursing Home Finish Receiving COVID-19 Vaccinations.

The New York Times (2/12, A1, Mervosh, Alfiky, 20.6M) reported on the atmosphere in Good Shepherd Nursing Home in West Virginia after residents finished receiving their COVID-19 vaccinations. However, "even with the vaccinations completed," residents must still continue adhering to numerous social distancing precautions.

Massachusetts Baby Boomers Waiting To Get COVID-19 Vaccine As State Prioritizes Those Over 75.

The Boston Globe (2/15, Weisman, 1.04M) reports numerous baby boomers in Massachusetts have been waiting for months, knowing "they're next in line for shots under the state's slow-rolling vaccination program." Last week, state officials "unveiled a buddy system that allows younger people to get shots if they escort someone over 75." Governor Charlie Baker said last Wednesday, "We'll move beyond where we are now when we feel like we've done as much as we can do to get the folks who are part of the communities who are currently eligible vaccinated."

Republicans Nationwide More Supportive Of Biden Relief Plan Than GOP Lawmakers.

The Washington Post (2/14, Witte, 10.52M) reported that while Republicans in Congress "overwhelmingly oppose" President Biden's $1.9 trillion COVID relief bill, "casting it as bloated and budget-busting, with some heaping particular scorn on a measure to send $350 billion in assistance to states and cities," to Republicans at the state and local level nationwide, the bill "dangles the tantalizing prospect of a reprieve." According to the Post, "Surveys show that a broad majority of Americans support the assistance, including large numbers of Republicans," and "only a minority among Republican voters agree with GOP lawmakers that the aid package is too large, polls have found."

The New York Times (2/14, A1, Shear, 20.6M) reported "House committees are already debating parts of the coronavirus relief legislation." However, former President Trump's "influence with Republicans will be an obstacle" to the Biden agenda, which needs some Republican support "to overcome a filibuster in the Senate."

Similarly, the Wall Street Journal (2/15, Leary, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) suggests Biden will have a hard time getting Republican support for his platform. Strategist Scott Reed explained Biden's "continuing lurch to the left on domestic policy is creating a strong contrast for the midterm elections already," and is "giving Republicans plenty of ammo."

Also reporting are the AP (2/12, Boak, Freking), Reuters (2/12, Shalal), and CNN (2/15, Fox, 89.21M).

NYTimes Analysis: Biden, Fed Cast Aside Inflation Worries To Push COVID-19 Relief.

The New York Times (2/15, Tankersley, Smialek, 20.6M) reports in an analysis that as President Biden moves forward with his COVID-19 relief package, he and his "top economic advisers are brushing aside" warnings about inflation, "as is the Federal Reserve under Chair Jerome H. Powell." They "have decided the risk of 'overheating' the economy is much lower than the risk of failing to heat it up enough." The Times says they are "staying the course despite a growing outcry from some economists across the political spectrum, including Lawrence Summers, a former Treasury secretary and top adviser in the Clinton and Obama administrations, who say Mr. Biden's plans could stir up a whirlwind of rising prices."

Activists Reportedly Worry Biden Undermines Minimum Wage Effort In COVID-19 Relief.

The AP (2/15, Weissert, Jaffe) reports, "The coronavirus has renewed focus on challenges facing hourly employees," and President Biden "has responded by including a provision in the massive pandemic relief bill that would more than double the minimum wage from the current $7.25 to $15 per hour." Still, the AP says that Biden has become "an unexpected roadblock" to the measure as he has "seemingly undermined the push to raise the minimum wage by acknowledging its dim prospects in Congress." That, adds the AP, is "frustrating to activists...who worry their victory is being snatched away at the last minute despite an administration that's otherwise an outspoken ally."

Opinion: COVID Relief Bill Debate Misses Point Of Stimulus.

Mervyn King, Alan Greenspan Professor of Economics at NYU Stern School of Business and professor of law at NYU School of Law, writes in Bloomberg Opinion (2/15) that the "focus on the mere size of" President Biden's COVID-19 relief bill "draws attention away from what is actually going on in our economies." King argues the "key words ought to be support and shift – support in the short run for those worst affected, and the shift of resources that will be needed later." The goal of spending, he adds "is not to stimulate spending but to enable businesses and the self-employed to survive while maintaining employment."

WPost Analysis: State And Local Governments Cut 1.3M Jobs During Pandemic.

The Washington Post (2/15, A1, Fowers, Siegel, 10.52M) reports that according to its analysis, "state and local governments have shed 1.3 million jobs since the pandemic began last year" or "more than 1 in 20 government jobs." Overall, "at least 26 states" saw revenue declines, reaching "10 percent or more in five states," and "the toll was felt in both Republican led states like Texas, which saw a 10 percent shortfall, and Democratic led ones, like Oregon which weathered a 13 percent drop." The Post adds, "Rescuing struggling state and local governments

has been at the center of Congress' debate" over pandemic aid. The Post also reports that "state and local governments are large employers, accounting for about 13 percent of non-farm jobs in February 2020," and at the state level "cuts to education spending make up almost all of the job losses," while "on the local level, public education accounted for just over half of job losses."

Opinion: Finance Guru Dave Ramsey Was Wrong To Mock Stimulus Checks.

In a Washington Post (2/13, 10.52M) op-ed, columnist Helaine Olen blasted personal finance guru Dave Ramsey for saying "if $600 or $1,400 changes your life, you were pretty much screwed already." Olen criticized Ramsey for making light of the issue, and argues that the economy is "going into a deep freeze" due to the coronavirus pandemic, making it difficult for people to find work. She added that "a large majority of Americans, including a majority of Republicans, supports another four-figure stimulus check."

Biden's $3,000 Per-Child Benefit May Face Challenges, Experts Warn.

The Washington Post (2/12, Stein, 10.52M) reported "President Biden may struggle to deliver his proposed $3,000-per-child benefit to millions of the nation's poorest families" as part of his COVID-19 relief bill. Policy experts warn that the new program could "struggle to reach two vulnerable groups likely to be among those who need help the most: households where incomes are so low families don't file federal income taxes and families experiencing changes in their living arrangements." The gap could overlook "as many as 3.2 million children" living in homes that do not file taxes, and is "likely to struggle to reach the millions of families experiencing changes in child custody arrangements because the agency lacks current information about family status."

Coronavirus Stimulus Recipients Boost Consumer Spending.

The Wall Street Journal (2/14, Torry, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reported consumer spending by individuals making less than $60,000 annually rose by more than 20% in early January, after the Treasury Department began sending aid to lower-income families, suggesting a "significant pent-up demand for necessities."

Remote Learning Amid COVID-19 Leads To Weight Gain Among Children, Doctors Warn.

The Wall Street Journal (2/14, King, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reported pediatricians are warning that the coronavirus pandemic's disruption of in-person classes and other activities is leading to weight gain among children that could have long-lasting health impacts. With students spending more time at home, kids are snacking more and exercising less. Doctors and nutritionists are worried that children are more at risk for type-two diabetes and asthma.

Former CDC Director Discusses Steps To Prepare For Future Pandemics.

Former CDC Director Tom Frieden wrote at the Wall Street Journal (2/12, Frieden, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) on the possibility of future pandemics, and details six steps to ensure better global preparedness. Frieden argued for developing a rapid response protocol, strengthening struggling health systems, relying on global organizations, increasing spending by wealthier countries, ensuring a cohesive global response, and committing to act immediately when a new pandemic is identified.

FDA Approves Becton Dickinson Rapid COVID-19, Flu Test.

Reuters (2/12, Roy) reported the Food and Drug Administration last week issued an emergency use authorization for Becton Dickinson's molecular test "that detects viruses that cause COVID-19 as well as influenza and produces result in 2-3 hours." The test "can also detect the U.K. and South Africa variants of the coronavirus and is available for order in the United States and Europe."

Also reporting are the Washington Times (2/13, Tan, 626K) and Fox News (2/12, Hein, 23.99M).

COVID-19 Leaving Millions Jobless, Taking A Toll On Mental Health.

USA Today (2/15, Jones, 12.7M) reports more people are being forced to live in cars and RVs after losing their jobs and homes during the pandemic. Among the "millions of Americans who lost jobs during the economic downturn sparked by the pandemic, or who have seen their hours and wages cut, the toll on mental health is also widespread" – over half "said they were dealing with more mental health challenges like anxiety and depression," while 70% reported feeling more stress and 81% "said they'd felt adrift, fought more with loved ones or experienced other emotional issues since losing their jobs."

States Expanding COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Faster Than They Can Receive Adequate Doses.

The New York Times (2/15, Tompkins, Delkic, Zraick, Slotnik, 20.6M) reports, "Racing to ramp up Covid-19 vaccinations, states have opened mass inoculation sites and expanded eligibility." However, a big problem exists: "The supply is not increasing quickly enough." The US "is gradually administering more doses every day, now up to an average of about 1.7 million, according to a New York Times database. ... States are also steadily widening access beyond the most vulnerable groups, frontline health care workers and nursing home staff and residents."

Iowa Lags In Delivery Of COVID-19 Vaccine Because Of Inadequate Preparation, Lack Of Staff, Other Issues.

The AP (2/14, Pitt) reported, "Iowa's lagging ability to broadly deliver coronavirus vaccines to people is due to inadequate preparation, confusing communication and a lack of staff and resources at local agencies, according to public health managers and experts."

Black Hospital Workers In Chicago Refuse COVID-19 Vaccine.

The AP (2/12, Tanner) reported, "Just 37% of the 600 doctors, nurses and support staff at Roseland Community Hospital [in Chicago] have been vaccinated even though health care workers are first in line." The article many of those who refuse to be vaccinated "come from the mostly Black, working class neighborhoods surrounding the hospital."

Providing COVID-19 Vaccine To LA's Homeless People "Fraught With Obstacles."

The Los Angeles Times (2/15, Oreskes, 3.37M) reports physicians and nurses in Los Angeles "culled a list of nearly 900 homeless people they wanted to vaccinate." The objective "was to offer a lifeline to one of Los

Angeles' most vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations." However, "the effort to vaccinate the homeless population and the skid row community, which is just getting underway, is fraught with obstacles."

New Health Department Data In California Show Disparities In COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution.

The Los Angeles Times (2/14, Velarde, 3.37M) reported new data from the California Department of Public Health show that statewide, white Californians "have received 32.7% of the first available doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, compared with 16% for Latinos, 13% for Asians, 2.9% for Black people and 0.3% for native populations."

The San Francisco Chronicle (2/13, Neilson, 2.44M) also reported.

Philadelphia Shutters Mass COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic Amid Concerns About Personal Data.

On its front page, the Washington Post (2/14, A1, Sellers, 10.52M) reported Philadelphia's "first mass vaccination site looked like a model of 21st-century efficiency. ... The innovative operation delivered coronavirus shots to almost 7,000 people in just five days, ushering them swiftly through private immunization pods." However, after the city's "health department learned that Philly Fighting Covid...had launched a for-profit company in December, the city abruptly shuttered the vaccination clinics. Officials said they had lost trust in the group, citing concerns that changes in its data policy might allow personal information to be sold."

College Campus Housing Staff Push For Access To COVID-19 Vaccine.

The Washington Post (2/13, Lumpkin, 10.52M) reported housing staff members on college campuses throughout the US "are pushing to make sure they're vaccinated alongside other essential workers." These employees "say their jobs carry more responsibilities – and new risks," including "enforcing mask-wearing and social distancing and escorting their sick peers to isolation housing."

New York Governor Faces New Allegations Of Covering Up Nursing Home Deaths.

On its front page, the New York Times (2/12, A1, McKinley, Ferré-Sadurní, 20.6M) reported New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) is "facing new allegations" that he and his aides "covered up the scope of the death toll in the state's nursing homes." According to the Times, "The latest revelations came in the wake of private remarks by the governor's top aide, Melissa DeRosa, and a cascading series of reports and court orders that have nearly doubled the state's official toll of nursing home deaths in the last two weeks."

Other news outlets covering the story include ProPublica (2/12, Sexton, 235K), the AP (2/15, Peltz), The Hill (2/15, Coleman, 5.69M), Politico New York (2/15, Mahoney), USA Today (2/15, Robinson, 12.7M), NBC Nightly News (2/15, story 6, 1:35, Holt, 6.44M), and HuffPost (2/15, Karanth, 363K).

Cuomo Acknowledges Withholding Data On Nursing Home Deaths During The COVID-19 Pandemic. Reuters (2/15, McKay) reports that on Monday, Cuomo acknowledged "that his office should not have withheld data on COVID-19 nursing home deaths from state lawmakers, the public and press – falling short of an apology a senior aide made to lawmakers last week." At a press conference, he said things "should have been done differently."

White House Press Secretary Will Not Comment On Whether Or Not President Biden Has Confidence In Cuomo. Fox News (2/12, Singman, 23.99M) reported, "White House press secretary Jen Psaki

on Friday dodged a question about whether President Biden has confidence in New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo amid the controversy surrounding underreported COVID-19 nursing home deaths in the state." She "was asked whether the president had confidence in Cuomo, after Biden hosted a group of bipartisan governors and mayors at the White House Friday to discuss coronavirus response efforts."

New Jersey Officials Blame Microsoft Glitches For COVID-19 Vaccination Appointment Issues.

The Hill (2/12, Lonas, 5.69M) reported, "New Jersey officials are blaming Microsoft systems that were supposed to help vaccination efforts for allegedly glitching over the past five weeks." Daily issues include difficulty booking appointments and the loss of registrations. The article added, "Microsoft told Bloomberg that they know of some issues with the system in New Jersey, but did not comment further."

Montana Governor Lifts Mask Mandate.

The AP (2/12, Samuels) reported that on Friday, Montana Gov. Greg Gianforte (R) lifted the state's mask mandate. However, "some cities and counties are keeping local mask requirements because they think the governor's move was premature."

The Hill (2/12, Weixel, 5.69M) also reported.

Massachusetts Medical Leaders Disagree With Governor's Plan To Pause COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution To Hospitals.

The AP (2/13) reported, "Some Massachusetts hospital leaders and physicians said they disagree with a plan by the administration of Gov. Charlie Baker [R] to halt vaccine distribution to hospitals and primary care offices" in order to "place the focus on vaccination sites."

Washington State To Focus On Second COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.

The AP (2/12) reported Washington "will focus on administering second vaccine doses next week and because of that, appointments to get a first dose next week will be extremely limited...state health officials said Friday." The DOH plans to allocate this week's first doses to "long term care facilities, adult family homes, mass vaccination sites in King, Pierce, Snohomish and Spokane counties and other sites that address equity."

People With Disabilities Are Afraid They Will Be Left Behind In The COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.

The AP (2/14, Whitehurst) reported, "Though many people with disabilities are more vulnerable to COVID-19, in some U.S. states they fear being left behind in a massive effort to get limited vaccines into the arms of those who need them most." The article said those "with disabilities have been pushed down the priority list in places like North Carolina and California, where the state reversed course after days of public pressure."

Two San Francisco Mass COVID-19 Vaccination Sites Temporarily Shutter Due To Lack Of Supply.

ABC News (2/15, Hutchinson, 2.44M) reports San Francisco's mass vaccination sites at the Moscone Center and San Francisco City College have temporarily closed due to a shortage of COVID-19 vaccine doses. Despite the lack of supply, city officials plan to move forward with a third mass vaccination site at the Produce Market.

Experts Warn New Spike In COVID-19 Cases Could Occur This Summer If States Prematurely Lift Restrictions.

ABC News (2/14, Ebbs, Haslett, 2.44M) reported, "Last summer, some states prematurely pulled back [COVID-19] restrictions before they hit the federal criteria to safely reopen, bringing on the biggest spike the country had seen at that point." The article said experts are warning "the same situation could happen across the country as states like Iowa and Montana lift mask mandates, New York allows stadiums to reopen, California pulls back its stay-at-home orders and Illinois allows more people to partake in indoor dining."

Data Show Only 11% Of Alabamians Who Received COVID-19 Vaccine Are Black.

Alabama Live (2/12, Cason, 497K) reported, "Incomplete data released by the Alabama Department of Public Health shows that only 11% of people who have received COVID-19 vaccinations are Black, even though Blacks make up about 27% of the state's population." The ADPH plans "to hire a company for a large scale media campaign aimed at encouraging Blacks to receive vaccinations," according to a state official.

Pennsylvania Secretary Of Health Orders Providers To Administer 80% Of First Doses Within Seven Days Of Receiving COVID-19 Vaccine.

The Allentown (PA) Morning Call (2/12, Turner, 460K) reported that on Friday, Pennsylvania's Acting Secretary of Health Alison Beam "ordered providers to administer 80% of first doses to people within seven days of receiving them and to have a staffed phone line for people who want to book appointments that way." She also noted "there would be a narrowing-down of the number of vaccine providers to focus on those that are most efficient in getting shots into arms."

Colorado Eases Restrictions On Indoor Dining.

The Denver Post (2/12, Sexton, 660K) reported, "Colorado business owners and customers are figuring out their own comfort levels after another relaxation of public health restrictions on indoor spaces, including restaurants, took effect Feb. 6." Restaurants in most counties can now offer indoor dining at up to 50% capacity.

One-Third Of Residents In Tuluksak, Alaska Diagnosed With COVID-19.

USA Today (2/14, Ball, 12.7M) reported approximately one-third of residents in Tuluksak, Alaska – "most of whom belong to the Tuluksak Native Community tribe" – have been diagnosed with COVID-19. The remote village, like many others, is now on lockdown.

Californians With Underlying Health Conditions Will Be Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine March 15.

The Los Angeles Times (2/12, Sharp, 3.37M) reported that on Friday, California officials announced people aged "16 to 64 who are disabled or at high risk for morbidity and mortality from COVID-19 will be eligible for vaccination beginning next month."

According to the San Francisco Chronicle (2/12, Ho, 2.44M), "The underlying conditions that will result in vaccine eligibility on March 15 include cancer, chronic kidney disease at stage four or above, chronic pulmonary disease, Down syndrome, a weakened immune system from a solid organ transplant, sickle cell disease, pregnancy, heart conditions, severe obesity...and Type 2 diabetes."

The AP (2/12, Ronayne, Thompson) reported that the state "will soon expand its list of people eligible for coronavirus vaccinations by another 4 million to 6 million people."

The Sacramento (CA) Bee (2/12, Bollag, 519K) and the Orange County (CA) Register (2/12, Wheeler, 594K) also reported.

Florida Emergency Management Official Overseeing COVID-19 Response Resigns.

The AP (2/15, Calvan) reports Florida's Division of Emergency Management leader Jared Moskowitz resigned on Monday, "citing the grueling nature of the role – exacerbated by the demands of orchestrating the state's pandemic response – for his decision to leave the key post." Moskowitz was "one of Florida's top lieutenants in the fight against the coronavirus outbreak."

The Hill (2/15, Coleman, 5.69M) and the Miami Herald (2/15, Klas, 647K) also cover the story.

Oklahoma Health Officials Learn Federally Supported COVID-19 Vaccination Sites Do Not Come With Additional Vaccines.

The AP (2/13, Mulvihill, Murphy) reported Oklahoma health officials "jumped at the chance to add large, federally supported vaccination sites" when the Biden Administration unveiled its "plan to open 100 vaccination sites by the end of the month." Officials want to open sites in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Lawton. However, "plans are now on hold after the state learned that the sites would not come with additional vaccines."

Amazon Sues New York Attorney General To Stop COVID-19 Charges.

The New York Times (2/12, Weise, 20.6M) reported that on Friday, Amazon filed a lawsuit against New York Attorney General Letitia James (D) "in an attempt to stop her from bringing charges against the company over safety concerns at two of its warehouses in New York City." According to the Times, Amazon also asked the US District Court for the Eastern District of New York "to force Ms. James to declare that she does not have authority to regulate workplace safety during the Covid-19 pandemic."

Massachusetts Offers COVID-19 Vaccine To Those Who Accompany Elders To Mass Vaccination Sites.

The New York Times (2/12, A1, Barry, 20.6M) reported on its front page, "Massachusetts began a first-in-the-nation experiment, offering vaccinations to those who accompany people who are 75 and older to mass vaccination sites." The intent is "to ease access problems for older people, who have struggled to book online appointments and travel to sports stadiums."

California Church Postpones Conference After LA County Health Officials Warn Indoor Conferences Are Prohibited.

The New York Times (2/12, Levenson, 20.6M) reported Grace Community Church announced on Friday "it had postponed an indoor conference that was expected to draw as many as 3,000 people from across the country to

Southern California." The church "reversed course after Los Angeles County health officials warned that indoor conferences were prohibited and that the event could worsen the spread of the coronavirus."

Disability Rights Advocates Urge Massachusetts To Expand COVID-19 Vaccine Priority To More People With Underlying Conditions.

The Boston Globe (2/12, Pan, 1.04M) reported, "Disability rights advocates have been pleading with Massachusetts officials for weeks to revise the state's vaccine allocation plan and expand priority to more people with underlying conditions." They say "relying solely" on the CDC's non-exhaustive list "disadvantages people with rare diseases."

Massachusetts Legislators Urge Governor To Modify COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.

The Boston Herald (2/13, Cotter, 327K) reported Massachusetts legislators have "sent a flurry of letters urging [Gov.] Baker [R] to make tweaks large and small to the vaccine rollout – rethinking the companion system, adding asthma to the list of eligible medical conditions – and have filed emergency legislation to improve equity, create a preregistration system and a centralized online portal for appointment booking."

Experts Fear Massachusetts' Decision To Stop New COVID-19 Vaccine Appointments At Hospitals Could Be Disruptive.

The Boston Herald (2/12, Kashinsky, 327K) reported Massachusetts' "push for hospitals to pause scheduling new first-dose coronavirus vaccine appointments amid limited supply could be disruptive in reaching high-risk patients, medical experts and public officials fear."

DC, Maryland, Virginia Could Receive More Than $14B In Direct COVID-19 Relief Funding.

The Washington Post (2/12, Flynn, 10.52M) reported, "More than $14 billion in direct coronavirus relief funding may be pouring into government coffers in the District, Maryland and Virginia in coming months – and for D.C., that could include the $755 million it was denied in the first relief package nearly a year ago."

Prince George's County Officials Apologize For Faulty Vaccine Rollout.

The Washington Post (2/13, Chason, 10.52M) reported, "Prince George's County officials apologized Saturday for a vaccine rollout they acknowledged has been plagued with technological difficulties and promised changes in its scheduling system to tackle a long wait list."

Virginia Democrats To Unveil Legislation To Reopen Schools.

The Washington Post (2/13, Schneider, 10.52M) reported, "Democrats in the House of Delegates are set to unveil legislation on Monday to get students across Virginia back into public school classrooms by summer." On Friday, the CDC "rolled out guidelines for reopening schools, and Gov. Ralph Northam (D) has called for Virginia systems to offer an in-person option by March 15."

Virginia To Launch Statewide System For COVID-19 Vaccine Scheduling.

The Washington Post (2/12, Fadulu, Olivo, 10.52M) reported Virginia is adopting "a statewide system for people to register for the coronavirus vaccine after weeks of confusion as people tried to navigate sign-up systems in

individual health districts." The new system will combine "vaccine appointment wait lists compiled by the state's local health districts" into a master list.

The AP (2/12) reported that the new system is "intended to offer a more user-friendly way for people to express interest in getting a shot and for public health officials to manage the lists." It is expected to go live Tuesday morning.

St. Louis-Area Group Homes Struggle To Find COVID-19 Vaccine For Residents.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch (2/14, Gray, 694K) reported, "Leaders of St. Louis-area group homes that serve intellectually disabled adults have struggled to secure doses of COVID-19 vaccine for their staff and clients." Instead of "a state system linking specific vaccine vendors to prospective recipients high on the list of eligibility," leaders were told "to be 'scrappy'" by a Department of Mental Health official.

Some Fitness Trainers Received COVID-19 Vaccine As "Health Care Workers" In California.

The AP (2/12) reported, "Some fitness trainers in California were able to get vaccinated against COVID-19 after state health officials created a loophole that helped them qualify as health care workers." The Department of Public Health "classified outdoor recreation as health care," which allowed fitness centers to get their employees inoculated. However, last Friday, "state health officials updated the rules and they no longer include outdoor recreation as Health Care."

Minnesota Health Officials Remind Residents To Wear Masks.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune (2/14, Olson, 855K) reported that as Gov. Tim Walz (DFL) "scaled back capacity restrictions designed to reduce viral transmissions in bars, restaurants, fitness centers, entertainment venues and private social gatherings" this week, health officials "reminded Minnesotans that one properly worn mask...will help protect them from COVID-19."

Governor Says Minnesota Could Lead The Way On Resuming In-Person Learning.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune (2/14, Lonetree, Olson, 855K) reported that on Friday, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz (DFL) "said that the state was positioned to potentially lead the country in the return to in-person learning." He "declined to give a target date for a full return to classroom life, saying such decisions are up to local leaders, but he predicted the state's approach would put it ahead of the school-reopening strategy released Friday by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention."

Governor Says President Biden Is Targeting Florida Despite Pandemic Success.

Newsweek (2/14, Fearnow, 2.67M) reported, "Florida Republican Governor Ron DeSantis said Sunday during a Fox News interview that Florida's housing and economic situation is 'thriving,' which has prompted 'lockdowner' Democrats like President Joe Biden to target the state's success."

Nebraska Governor Continues To Focus On Vaccinating Older Residents Despite Pressure From Teachers.

The Omaha (NE) World-Herald (2/12, Robb, Dejka, 509K) reported, "Gov. Pete Ricketts [R] is reinforcing the state's focus on vaccinating older Nebraskans against COVID-19 as teachers keep pressing to move up the priority list."

Chicago-Area Counties Have Some Of The Lowest COVID-19 Vaccination Rates In Illinois.

The Chicago Tribune (2/12, Freishtat, McCoppin, 2.03M) provided an overview of COVID-19 vaccination rates in counties throughout Illinois. The article said Chicago and Cook and DuPage counties reported that less than 10% of residents have receives their first dose of the vaccine.

Ohio Governor Suggests He Will Withhold Teachers' COVID-19 Vaccinations If Schools Don't Open By March 1.

The Cleveland Plain Dealer (2/12, Pelzer, 1.22M) reported, "Gov. Mike DeWine [R] on Friday evening upped the pressure on Ohio schools to return to in-person classes on March 1, suggesting he would not begin teacher vaccinations at schools that don't."

Courts Unlikely To Grant COVID-19 Restriction, Lockdown Challenges By Individuals, Businesses.

The Wall Street Journal (2/13, Gershman, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reported lawsuits brought by businesses and individuals challenging COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns have mostly resulted in defeat.

LA County Hospital Violated Rules By Providing COVID-19 Vaccine To Private School Teachers.

The Los Angeles Times (2/13, Blume, 3.37M) reported, "Northridge Hospital Medical Center violated county rules when it provided COVID-19 immunizations to teachers and other staff at the private Wesley School in North Hollywood and elsewhere, county officials said this week." Northridge "has acknowledged the mistake and said it would not be repeated, but the episode raised concerns anew about equitable distribution of the potentially lifesaving vaccine."

According to the AP (2/13), "Teachers and other school employees are not currently authorized by the Los Angeles County Health Department to receive doses for the vaccine."

California's COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Plagued By Data Issues, Inaccuracies.

The Los Angeles Times (2/14, Gutierrez, 3.37M) reported California's coronavirus vaccine rollout "has been plagued by data issues, leaving the state unable to keep track of how many doses of the lifesaving COVID-19 vaccine are available at any one time."

New Yorkers With Chronic Health Conditions Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine.

The New York Times (2/14, Rosa, Rothfeld, 20.6M) reported, "New Yorkers with chronic health conditions that made them newly eligible for the Covid-19 vaccine flooded a state website and call center Sunday morning, leaving many unable to immediately schedule appointments at mass vaccination centers." As of 11:30 a.m. on Sunday, state officials said "73,000 appointments had been scheduled."

The AP (2/14, Villeneuve) reported that three million more New Yorkers "over 16 with so-called comorbidities" are now eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. Eligible health conditions include "cancer, pregnancy, heart conditions, weakened immune systems, sickle cell disease, diabetes, neurologic conditions, liver disease, obesity, pulmonary disease, chronic kidney disease and intellectual and development disabilities such as Down Syndrome."

ABC News (2/15, Schumaker, 2.44M) also reports.

Nebraska Orders 90% Of COVID-19 Vaccine Doses Go To People Aged 65 And Older.

The AP (2/12, Schulte) reported, "Nebraska state officials have told retail pharmacies and local public health agencies offering coronavirus vaccinations to give at least 90% of their doses to senior citizens."

Congressional Lawmakers Ask HHS To Ban Preferential Access To COVID-19 Vaccine.

The AP (2/12) reported, "More than two dozen members of the U.S. House of Representatives have called on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to ban health care providers from offering special access to COVID-19 vaccines." The request "would increase pressure, and potential consequences, for vaccine providers who offer preferential access to taxpayer-funded vaccines."

Honolulu Mayor Extends COVID-19 Restrictions.

The AP (2/14) reported, "Honolulu Mayor Rick Blangiardi [I] has extended coronavirus restrictions for another month through mid-March starting Monday, but said that could change if confirmed cases remain low." Should numbers remain low, Blangiardi "will shift the island to the next reopening stage before March 15."

White House Calls On China To Make Data Available On Early Days Of Pandemic.

Reuters (2/13, Shalal, Martina) reported, "The White House on Saturday called on China to make available data from the earliest days of the COVID-19 outbreak, saying it has 'deep concerns' about the way the findings of the World Health Organization's COVID-19 report were communicated."

The Hill (2/13, Easley, 5.69M) reported that White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said, "We have deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the COVID-19 investigation were communicated and questions about the process used to reach them. ... It is imperative that this report be independent, with expert findings free from intervention or alteration by the Chinese government. To better understand this pandemic and prepare for the next one, China must make available its data from the earliest days of the outbreak."

The AP (2/14) reported, "China fired back at the U.S. on Sunday over allegations from the White House that Beijing withheld some information about the coronavirus outbreak from World Health Organization investigators."

Politico Europe (2/14, 15K) reported, "U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he backed the United States' call on China to release information on the first cases of the disease detected in the country and not to interfere in the WHO's investigation." He said during an interview with CBS, "When you have a zoonotic plague like coronavirus, we need to know exactly how it happened. ... Indeed, if it's zoonotic, if it really originated from human contact with the animal kingdom, that's what is asserted. But we need to know exactly what happened. ... We need to see the data. We need to see all the evidence. So I thoroughly support what President Biden has said about that."

The Wall Street Journal (2/13, Leary, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) and Reuters (2/13, Shalal, Martina) also reported.

Research Encourages People To Spend Time In Nature To Stay Healthy.

The Wall Street Journal (2/14, Morris, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reported people have been spending more time indoors during the pandemic, but researchers and physicians emphasize the importance of spending time in nature to remain healthy and increase longevity.

Older Americans Consider Resuming Certain Activities Following COVID-19 Vaccinations.

The Wall Street Journal (2/15, West, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that older Americans who have received the COVID-19 vaccine now face a myriad of choices as they consider which activities to resume. According to the Journal, the CDC has indicated there isn't sufficient data about COVID-19 vaccine protections to affect guidance on social distancing and masks.

Professionals "Increasingly Alarmed" By "Deteriorating Mental State Of Young People."

The New York Times (2/14, Kwai, 20.6M) reported that with COVID restrictions "set to drag into the spring or even the summer, mental health professionals are growing increasingly alarmed about the deteriorating mental state of young people, who they say have been among the most badly affected by a world with a foreshortened sense of the future." The Times says that as they remain "last in line for vaccines and with schools and universities shuttered, young people have borne much of the burden of the sacrifices being made largely to protect older people, who are more at risk from severe infections."

Scientists Envision Surveillance System For New Viruses.

The New York Times (2/15, Greenwood, 20.6M) reports on a pilot project called "the Global Immunological Observatory." Scientists "envision an immense surveillance system that can check blood from all over the world for the presence of antibodies to hundreds of viruses at once." This "way, when the next pandemic washes over us, scientists will have detailed, real-time information on how many people have been infected by the virus and how their bodies responded."

Pandemics Throughout History Have Spawned Extremist Movements, Experts Say.

The Washington Post (2/14, Fisher, 10.52M) reported, "Since ancient times, pandemics have spurred sharp turns in political beliefs, spawning extremist movements, waves of mistrust and wholesale rejection of authorities." Now, "nearly a year into the coronavirus crisis, Americans are falling prey to the same phenomenon, historians, theologians and other experts say, exemplified by a recent NPR-Ipsos poll in which nearly 1 in 5 said they believe Satan-worshipping, child-enslaving elites seek to control the world."

House Hopes To Set Aside $50M For Increased Toy, Consumer Product Safety Screenings.

USA Today (2/12, Stein, Murphy, 12.7M) reported, "The U.S. House of Representatives aims to set aside $50 million for increased safety screenings of toys and consumer products at U.S. ports after a USA TODAY investigation exposed a plunge in inspections for hazards such as lead and choking dangers during the pandemic." A "spending proposal passed on Friday by the House Energy and Commerce Committee is a

significant cash infusion for the Consumer Product Safety Commission, whose annual budget last year was $133 million."

CDC Data Indicate US Has Administered 52.9M Doses Of COVID-19 Vaccine.

Reuters (2/14, Singh) reported the US "has administered 52,884,356 doses of COVID-19 vaccines as of Sunday morning and delivered 70,057,800 doses, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said." Some "38,292,270 people had received one or more doses while 14,077,440 people have received the second dose as of Sunday."

COVID-19 May Never Disappear, And May Become Another Illness Humans Must Contend With, Experts Predict.

The AP (2/14, Ghosal, Larson) reported according to experts, it is "likely that some version of" COVID-19 "will linger for years. But what it will look like in the future is less clear." One of them predicted that ultimately, "the virus known as SARS-CoV-2 will become yet 'another animal in the zoo,' joining the many other infectious diseases that humanity has learned to live with." Yet, "no one knows for sure. The virus is evolving rapidly, and new variants are popping up in different countries."

US Hospitals Say Supplies Of PPE, Other Crucial Medical Equipment At All-Time Low As Pandemic Persists.

The Hill (2/14, Bowden, 5.69M) reported US hospitals "say their supplies of crucial medical supplies including personal protective equipment (PPE) are lower than ever as demand for different items has soared to an all-time high." Data indicating "usage rates of PPE and other supplies analyzed by Premier, a company that consults for health care systems, revealed that usage of supplies for COVID-19 testing and treatment has reached the highest rate seen since the pandemic began last year."

Children Not Receiving Dental Care Amid Pandemic.

CNN International (2/15, Smith) reports, "Children are missing out on preventative dental care including teeth cleaning and checkups during the pandemic, according to a new survey." Since the beginning of the pandemic, "40% of parents have avoided seeking care at all, citing concerns about infection, office closures and cost." This is "not good, said pediatric dentist and American Dental Association spokesperson Dr. Jonathan Shenkin," who warned, "Delays in preventative care could result in kids developing more tooth decay."

Four Drugmakers To Write Off Part Of Opioid Settlement Costs.

The Washington Post (2/12, MacMillan, Schaul, 10.52M) reported four drugmakers "that agreed to pay a combined $26 billion to settle claims about their roles in the opioid crisis plan to deduct some of those costs from their taxes and recoup around $1 billion apiece," regulatory filings show. Johnson & Johnson, McKesson, AmerisourceBergen, and Cardinal Health "all updated their financial projections to include large tax benefits stemming from the expected deal," and all "disavow any wrongdoing or legal responsibility." However, the article suggested the write-downs "may deepen public anger toward" the companies, which prosecutors claim "played key roles in a destructive public health crisis that kills tens of thousands of Americans every year."

Also reporting was the Wall Street Journal (2/12, Walker, Randazzo, Subscription Publication, 8.41M).

Weekly Trips To ED For Drug Overdoses Were Higher In 2020 Than 2019, Study Indicates.

USA Today (2/15, Rodriguez, 12.7M) reports researchers from the CDC found that weekly trips to the ED "for drug overdoses were higher in 2020 than in 2019." The findings were published in JAMA Psychiatry.

Public Health Experts Pressuring Biden Administration To Address Rise In Drug Overdose Deaths.

The Hill (2/15, Hellmann, 5.69M) reports public health advocates are putting pressure on the Biden Administration to address rising drug overdose deaths, which have "been overshadowed by the coronavirus pandemic." The advocates cite CDC data that show "more than 83,000 people in the U.S. are thought to have died of drug overdoses in the 12-month period ending (in) June."

BMS, Sanofi Ordered To Pay More Than $834M For Clopidogrel Marketing.

Reuters (2/15, Bellon, Raymond) reports Bristol Myers Squibb and Sanofi on Monday were ordered by US District Judge Dean Ochiai "to pay more than $834 million to the state of Hawaii for failing to properly warn non-white patients of health risks from its blood thinner Plavix [clopidogrel]." The article adds that "the companies had failed to change the drug's label to warn doctors and patients despite knowing some of the risks for more than a decade," according to Ochiai. The companies "said in a joint statement the decision was not supported by the overwhelming body of scientific evidence and vowed to appeal."

Bloomberg (2/15, Feeley, 3.57M) says the settlement "was awarded as a civil penalty for" the companies' "violation of Hawaii's consumer-protection laws through their improper Plavix marketing campaigns."

Experts Excited By Preliminary Study Of Drug Designed To Treat Hunter Syndrome.

STAT (2/12, Herper, 262K) reported, "A preliminary study of a medicine developed by Denali Therapeutics to treat Hunter syndrome, a rare genetic disease, has left outside experts encouraged by its potential." The study is scheduled to be presented at the medical meeting WORLDSymposium.

E-Cigarette Ad Appears On Remote Learning App, Prompting Colorado Lawmaker To Consider Stricter Marketing Regulations.

The Denver Post (2/12, Hindi, 660K) reported, "An e-cigarette ad appeared on an app used for remote learning last week, prompting at least one Colorado lawmaker to weigh potential legislation to prevent it from happening again." Specifically, "Rob Witwer, a former Republican state representative, posted a screengrab Friday from the Quizlet app that his son, who attends a school in the Jefferson County School District, was using, which showed an ad for IQOS – an e-cigarette from Philip Morris whose parent company is tobacco giant, Altria." It's not clear "how many students may have seen the ad and how many Colorado schools or classes use the remote learning app."

Erie School District Joins Many Others In Filing Suit Against Juul For Allegedly Targeting Minors.

The Erie (PA) Times-News (2/12, Palattella, 35K) reported, "The Erie School District is joining scores of public school districts and other government entities nationwide in taking legal action over underage vaping." The Erie

School Board has given the district authorization "to sue Juul Labs Inc., claiming the nation's largest electronic cigarette company wrongfully marketed its products – with their streamlined designs and fruity flavors – to youth, spurring a vaping epidemic among students, harming their health and adding to the district's costs." Plaintiffs who have filed suits against Juul "include school districts, Native American tribes and local and state governments." The CDC "has called the use of e-cigarettes by high school and middle school students an epidemic, providing fuel for the lawsuits aimed at Juul." Juul "did not fight the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's ban, starting in January 2020, of the sale of certain flavored e-cigarettes."

North Dakota House Rejects Bills That Would Increase Taxes On Cigarettes, Other Tobacco Products.

KNOX-FM Grand Forks, ND (2/12, Barrett) reported that in North Dakota, "the House has rejected two bills that would increase taxes on cigarettes and other tobacco products." Specifically, "one bill as amended would have raised the 44 cent tax on a pack of cigarettes by at least a dollar." Meanwhile, "a second bill would have raised taxes on cigarettes and other tobacco products."

Opinion: Minnesota Governor Wants To Penalize Retailers, Consumers By Raising Cigarette, Moist Snuff Taxes.

In an opinion piece for the Minneapolis Star Tribune (2/14, 855K), Minnesota Service Station and Convenience Store Association executive director Lance Klatt wrote, "Gov. Tim Walz's claim that his fiscal year 2022-23 budget will support small businesses rings hollow for convenience stores, gas stations and corner markets." According to Klatt, "Walz proposes to raise state cigarette and moist snuff taxes by 33% and assess new taxes on electronic cigarettes." Klatt said, "The governor wants to penalize retailers and consumers again by raising the tax another $1 per pack."

Rep. Josh Gottheimer Sponsored Anti-Vaping Legislation While Investing In Tobacco Conglomerate.

Roll Call (2/12, Marquette, 130K) reported, "Since coming to Congress in 2017, Rep. Josh Gottheimer has sponsored legislation to more tightly regulate tobacco products and aligned himself with a coalition of colleagues who advocate curbs on youth vaping – all while investing in a Fortune 200 tobacco conglomerate and receiving money from that firm's political action committee." According to Roll Call, "in February 2020, Gottheimer touted the House's passage of anti-vaping legislation he co-sponsored." Gottheimer's "2019 annual financial disclosure report – the most recent, comprehensive look available into his holdings that Gottheimer filed in August 2020 – shows stock in Altria Group, Inc. and Philip Morris International Inc."

South Carolina Bill Would Ban Local Municipalities From Enacting Laws Related To Certain Cigarette, Vape, Nicotine Products.

WCBD-TV Charleston, SC (2/12, deSaussure, 121K) reported that in South Carolina, "a bill making its way through the State House and Senate would ban local municipalities from enacting laws that health advocates say are crucial to curb smoking." If it is "passed, the bill would prohibit county, town, and city governments from enacting laws or ordinances that pertain to the ingredients, flavors, or licensing of cigarettes, electronic smoking devises, e-liquid, vapor products, and nicotine products."

South Carolina Lawmakers Looking To Break Apart State's Bloated Health, Environmental Agency.

The AP (2/15, Liu) reports South Carolina lawmakers are trying to break apart the state's Department of Health and Environmental Control amid a slew of criticisms "from all sides" during the coronavirus pandemic. The agency "only indirectly answers to elected officials," who "have said for years that it has become too powerful and unmanageable." Governor Henry McMaster (R) and Senate President Harvey Peeler (R) are "ready to split DHEC apart, bundling public health duties with the state's mental health department and funneling environmental permitting operations to other state agencies." However, supporters "say splitting up DHEC without adequate funding and staffing will only make problems worse, and that trying to do so during a pandemic is ill-timed."

Drinking Caffeinated Coffee Could Reduce Heart Failure Risk, Analysis Suggests.

The Washington Post (2/12, 10.52M) reported "drinking one or more cups of caffeinated coffee daily may lower your risk for heart failure" according to an analysis of three major studies that tracked "21,361 U.S. adults for at least 10 years." The analysis found "the odds of developing heart failure declined for participants who drank at least a cup of caffeinated coffee a day, but how much the risk fell varied." The findings were published in the Journal of the American Heart Association.

US Breast Cancer Death Rates No Longer Decreasing, Study Finds.

The Washington Post (2/11, Blakemore, 10.52M) reported a new study of "data gathered by the National Center for Health Statistics between 1969 and 2017" found "breast cancer death rates for women under 40 are no longer decreasing." Breast cancer deaths "had been falling steadily since 1989...but beginning in 2010, the breast cancer death rate rose 2.8 percent per year in women in their 20s and 0.3 percent per year in women in their 30s." Researchers "attribute the rise to a 'significant' increase in Stage 4 breast cancer among younger women." The findings (2/9, Hendrick, 4K) were published in the journal Radiology.

Delaying Sleep With Mindless TV, Internet Browsing May Increase Stress, Experts Warn.

CNN (2/15, Marples, 89.21M) reports on "revenge bedtime procrastination," a "cycle of staying up late and regretting it the next day" that "is all too familiar for many people, even before the pandemic." Researchers suggest people may be staying up later doing mindless activities to reduce stress, but some "common consequences" of missing sleep "are decreased productivity and a rise in cortisol, a stress hormone."

Some States Urge Federal Court To Allow Obtaining Abortion Pills Via Telemedicine.

The San Francisco Chronicle (2/12, Egelko, 2.44M) reported California and 22 other states "urged a federal appeals court Friday to allow women to obtain abortion pills from their doctors by telemedicine during the COVID-19 pandemic." The state argue telehealth "has proven to be a safe and effective method for the delivery of healthcare" during the pandemic, and warn that currently mandated in-person pickups "will force patients to engage in unnecessary travel and in-person contacts to access essential reproductive care, risking their exposure to and spread of COVID-19 and thwarting (states') efforts to manage the crisis."

CDC Calls For Action In West Virginia HIV Outbreak.

The AP (2/12) reported Centers for Disease Control officials last week warned that an HIV outbreak spreading in West Virginia's Kanawha County is "the most concerning in the United States," and called for urgent action. The number of HIV cases tied to drug use in the county has risen from two in 2018 to 35 in 2020. Demetre Daskalakis, head of the CDC's HIV/AIDS prevention program, told local officials to act quickly. The agency has recommended a "needs-based syringe service program" to address the issue, as well as community outreach and education.

Depression Symptoms Three Times Greater Since Pandemic, Survey Finds.

On NBC Nightly News (2/15, story 9, 1:45, Holt, 6.44M), Kristen Dahlgren reported on how the pandemic is negatively affecting those with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Dahlgren said, "A recent survey showed depression symptoms were three times more prevalent during the pandemic." However, she added, "Doctors say there are things patients can do. Telehealth is easier than ever. If you are feeling down, get help. A light box at home can help. Try to get outside and get exercise. Keep a schedule and hygiene routine, and make sure to connect with others, even if it is virtually."

State Lawmakers Taking More Action To Stop Drugmakers From Price Hikes Absent Federal Policy.

Kaiser Health News (2/12, Meyer) reported, "Fed up with a lack of federal action to lower prescription drug costs, state legislators around the country are pushing bills to penalize drugmakers for unjustified price hikes and to cap payment at much-lower Canadian levels." These state "bills, sponsored by both Republicans and Democrats in a half-dozen states, are a response to consumers' intensified demand for action on drug prices as prospects for solutions from Congress remain highly uncertain." According to the article, "bipartisan bills in Congress that would have penalized drugmakers for raising prices above inflation rates and capped out-of-pocket drug costs for enrollees in Medicare Part D drug plans died last year."

Analysis: Biden Faces Challenges In Confronting Pandemic.

White House reporter Stephen Collinson writes in an analysis in CNN International (2/16) that President "Biden faces urgent questions about how much of normal life can resume in the months to come" and "is now in a position to assume responsibility and, if necessary, blame for the federal effort" to distribute COVID-19 vaccines. Collinson adds that Biden "is under pressure to set expectations on school openings that his team has so far struggled to provide."

Physicians Seeing Striking Increase In Cases Of MIS-C.

The New York Times (2/16, Belluck, 20.6M) reports physicians across the US have seen "a striking increase in the number of young people with the" COVID-19-linked "condition...called Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children or MIS-C." The latest CDC data show "2,060 cases in 48 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia, including 30 deaths." According to the article, "While most young people, even those who became seriously ill, have survived and gone home in relatively healthy condition, doctors are uncertain whether any will experience lingering heart issues or other problems."

Some Providers In Greater DC Region Reportedly Concerned About Availability Of Second COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.

The Washington Post (2/15, Chason, Portnoy, 10.52M) reports, "Scarce supply of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines has stirred anxiety about whether the required second dose will be available." Furthermore, "different protocols in different jurisdictions – as well as several mishaps in recent weeks – have added to the frustration and concern in the greater Washington region." Many providers in Maryland and Virginia have held some first doses in reserve out of concern that second doses will not be available, slowing the pace of vaccinations.

Global Health News

WHO Authorizes Use Of AstraZeneca-Oxford Coronavirus Vaccine.

The New York Times (2/15, Mueller, 20.6M) reports, "The World Health Organization on Monday authorized the use of the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine, clearing a path for the cheap and easy-to-store shots to be distributed in lower- and middle-income countries around the world." This "authorization, expected after a panel of W.H.O. experts recommended use of the vaccine last week, applied to the vaccine's two manufacturers: AstraZeneca and the Serum Institute, the Indian producer that will supply many doses for the Covax initiative to bring vaccines to poorer parts of the world."

The AP (2/15, Cheng) reports, "The WHO's green light for the AstraZeneca vaccine is only the second one the U.N. health agency has issued after authorizing the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in December."

Among other sources covering the story are NBC Nightly News (2/15, story 7, 1:55, Holt, 6.14M), Bloomberg (2/15, Gretler, 3.57M), Forbes (2/15, Durkee, 10.33M), Reuters (2/15, Revill, Miller, Shields, Kelland), the Wall Street Journal (2/15, Steinhauser, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), The Hill (2/15, Bowden, 5.69M), and Politico (2/15, Furlong, 15K).

COVID-19 Vaccine Becomes Touchy Subject Ahead Of Olympics.

The Wall Street Journal (2/14, Bachman, Radnofsky, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reported that the COVID-19 vaccine has become a touchy subject ahead of the Olympics. Even mentioning inoculations for athletes provokes hostility amid a slow COVID-19 vaccine rollout across the globe.

Incoming WTO Chief Warns Against "Vaccine Nationalism" Amid Pandemic.

Reuters (2/15, Shalal) reports "the World Trade Organization's incoming chief on Monday warned against 'vaccine nationalism' that would slow progress in ending the COVID-19 pandemic and could erode economic growth for all countries – rich and poor." Incoming WTO chief "Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala told Reuters her top priority was to ensure the WTO does more to address the pandemic, saying members should accelerate efforts to lift export restrictions slowing trade in needed medicines and supplies." Okonjo-Iweala said, "No one is safe until everyone is safe. Vaccine nationalism at this time just will not pay, because the variants are coming. If other countries are not immunized, it will just be a blow back."

British Prime Minister Says World Powers Should Agree To Treaty On Pandemics To Ensure Transparency.

Reuters (2/15, Smout) reports "British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Monday that world powers should clinch a global treaty on pandemics to ensure proper transparency after the novel coronavirus outbreak which originated in China." He "said he would be keen to agree [to] a global treaty on pandemics where countries agreed to share data, amid British and U.S. concern over access given to a World Health Organization (WHO) mission to China." When he was "asked by Reuters about any action he wanted to improve transparency, Johnson said: 'I think what the world needs to see is a general agreement on how we track data surrounding zoonotic pandemics...and we want a joint agreement on transparency."

South Africa Asks Serum Institute Of India To Take Back 1M COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.

Reuters (2/15, Shibu, Kalia, Mitra) reports "South Africa has asked the Serum Institute of India to take back the one million COVID-19 vaccine doses the company had sent in early February, The Economic Times reported on Tuesday, a week after the country said it will put on hold use of AstraZeneca's shot in its vaccination program."

Israel Reports Three South African Variant Infections In People Who Had Recovered From A Previous Coronavirus Infection.

The Washington Post (2/15, Rubin, 10.52M) reports, "Israel's Health Ministry said Sunday that two Israelis who had recently recovered from the coronavirus have been reinfected by the variant first identified in South Africa, making a total of three such cases." The ministry also announced that Israel has a total of 44 infections identified as the South African variant. So far, "Israel has vaccinated more than 3.9 million of its citizens, more than 40 percent of its total population of about 9 million."

Elizabeth Palmer reported on the CBS Evening News (2/15, story 6, 1:40, Garrett, 4.75M) that "just days ago, Israel's lockdown was eased. A welcome new reality. And for the rest of us, perhaps, a glimpse of the future."

Numerous Lower-Income Countries Still Waiting For COVID-19 Vaccine As 152M Doses Have Been Administered Globally.

USA Today (2/13, Janetsky, 12.7M) reported, "While more than 152 million COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered globally, with roughly a third of those in the U.S., according to Bloomberg's vaccine tracker," numerous "lower- to middle-income countries...still had not administered a single dose by mid-February." Health experts have warned of this disparity "since the onset of the pandemic: While richer countries rapidly vaccinate their populations and buy up doses, other nations are projected to not have wider access to the vaccine until late 2022 or 2023, according to the World Health Organization (WHO)."

Malaysia Launching Rollout Of Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine Next Week.

Reuters (2/15, Sipalan) reports, "Malaysia will get its first batch of COVID-19 vaccines produced by U.S. and German drugmakers Pfizer and BioNTech on Feb. 21, and kick off its inoculation drive five days after that, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said on Tuesday." The country "aims to vaccinate at least 80% of its 32 million population within a year as it pushes to revive" its ailing economy.

Australia Approves COVID-19 Vaccine From AstraZeneca.

Reuters (2/15, Jose) reports, "Australia's medical regulator said on Tuesday it had granted provisional approval for" AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine. Australia plans to begin inoculating its population on February 22.

Chinese Government Weaponized COVID-19 Origin Disinformation Against US Through Internet, Analysis Says.

The AP (2/15) says, "A nine-month Associated Press investigation of state-sponsored disinformation conducted in collaboration with the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, shows how a rumor that the U.S. created the virus that causes COVID-19 was weaponized by the Chinese government, spreading from the dark corners of the Internet to millions across the globe." This "analysis was based on a review of millions of social media postings and articles on Twitter, Facebook, VK, Weibo, WeChat, YouTube, Telegram and other platforms." Chinese Communist Party "officials were reacting to a powerful narrative, nursed by QAnon groups, Fox News, former President Donald Trump and leading Republicans, that the virus was instead manufactured by China."

WHO Scientists Discuss Team's Findings During Wuhan Visit.

CNN (2/14, Walsh, 89.21M) reported Peter Ben Embarek, the lead investigator for the World Health Organization's recent mission to Wuhan, "told CNN in a wide-ranging interview that the mission had found several signs of the more wide-ranging 2019 spread, including establishing for the first time there were over a dozen strains of the virus in Wuhan already in December." He said the team "had a chance to speak to the first patient Chinese officials said had been infected, an office worker in his 40s, with no travel history of note, reported infected on December 8."

Axios (2/14, Rummler, 1.26M) reports Embarek told CNN that the WHO team identified 13 different strains of COVID-19 in Wuhan in December 2019, which "some virologists believe...could suggest that the virus had previously spread undetected."

In addition, Peter Daszak, a member of the WHO team and the president of EcoHealth Alliance in New York, in an interview with the New York Times (2/14, Gorman, 20.6M) "said that the visit had provided some new clues, which all of the scientists, Chinese and international, agreed most likely pointed to an animal origin within China or Southeast Asia." The Times adds Daszak "reflected on the atmosphere in Wuhan and his first glimpse of the seafood market where the initial outbreak occurred last year, although it was not the site of the first cases. He also said the path ahead would be straightforward scientifically, but not politically."

WHO Chief Does Not Rule Out Any Explanations For COVID-19 Origin.

Bloomberg (2/12, Miller, 3.57M) reported, "The World Health Organization hasn't ruled out any hypotheses about the roots of Covid-19, according to the group's chief, after a fact-finding mission to China rejected speculation that the coronavirus could have leaked from a lab." All explanations and "avenues of research remain open, Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a briefing Friday." The team's findings have "added important information that takes us closer to understanding the origins of the virus," he said.

Meanwhile, the Wall Street Journal (2/12, Page, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reported that according to World Health Organization investigators, Chinese officials "refused to provide" WHO "with raw, personalized data on early Covid-19 cases that could help them determine how and when the coronavirus first began to spread in China." The Journal says WHO investigators "described heated exchanges over the lack of detail." The Journal

goes on to report that "the Chinese authorities turned down requests to provide such data on 174 cases of Covid-19 that they have identified from the early phase of the outbreak in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019."

The Washington Post (2/12, Timberg, 10.52M) reported that while many scientists were skeptical of claims by Chinese virologist Li-Meng Yan in a paper last fall "that China had created the deadly coronavirus in a research lab...in an age when anyone can publish anything online with a few clicks, this response was not fast enough to keep" the virologist's "disputed allegations from going viral, reaching an audience in the millions on social media and Fox News." This "development, according to experts on misinformation...underscored how systems built to advance scientific understanding can be used to spread politically charged claims dramatically at odds with scientific consensus."

WHO Investigators Say China Refused To Provide Key Data.

The Hill (2/13, Lonas, 5.69M) reported, "World Health Organization investigators are saying that China refused to hand over key data on early coronavirus cases during their four-week long investigation of the origins of the virus in China."

The New York Times (2/12, Hernández, Gorman, 20.6M) and Reuters (2/13, Goh) also reported.

COVID-19 Already Spreading In Wuhan By December 2019, WHO Says.

The Hill (2/15, 5.69M) reports, "The coronavirus was already spreading widely throughout Wuhan, China, by December of 2019 and had already mutated into more than a dozen strains before the end of that year, World Health Organization investigators said Monday."

UK Vaccinates Nearly 25% Of Population, Begins Hotel Quarantines For Arrivals From 33 Countries.

The AP (2/15) reports, "Britain's newly established quarantine hotels received their first guests on Monday" as "passengers arriving at London's Heathrow Airport were escorted by security guards to buses that took them to nearby hotels." The UK has administered "a first dose of coronavirus vaccine to over 15 million people, almost a quarter of its population." On Monday, UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock "said the vaccination drive is now being extended to people over 65 and those with underlying health conditions."

The Washington Post (2/15, Adam, Booth, 10.52M) reports, "Britain's fast-running vaccination campaign appears to have hit its early target, offering a first dose to 15 million elderly people and health care workers by Monday," and Prime Minister Boris Johnson "hailed the National Health Service (NHS) for nailing the deadline." The Post adds, "overall, the uptake is surpassing what many infectious-disease experts thought likely."

UK Drug Regulator Auditing Serum Institute's Manufacturing In India To Allow Import Of COVID-19 Vaccines.

Reuters (2/15, Arora, Das, Rocha) reports that the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency "is auditing manufacturing processes at Serum Institute of India which could pave the way for AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine to be shipped from there to the UK and other countries, according to two sources close to the matter."

EU's Anti-Fraud Office Warns Member States Against COVID-19 Vaccine Scams.

The AP (2/15, Petrequin) reports, "The EU's anti-fraud office, OLAF, is urging member states to be vigilant against scammers offering to sell fake COVID-19 vaccines as the 27-nation bloc faces delays in the supply of shots."

EU In Talks With Moderna To Buy More COVID-19 Vaccines.

Reuters (2/15, Pollina, Guarascio) reports, "The EU is holding talks with Moderna on buying more COVID-19 vaccine and AstraZeneca, with which talks have stalled, has suggested delivering doses of its own vaccine made outside Europe to make up for supply cuts, two EU sources said." The bloc "is negotiating a new supply deal with Moderna that could nearly double the volume of vaccine doses from the U.S. biotech firm, two senior EU officials involved in the talks told Reuters."

Israel Combatting COVID-19 Vaccine Misinformation.

The AP (2/15, Scharf, Zion) reports, "After surging ahead in the race to vaccinate its population against the coronavirus, Israel is blaming online misinformation for a sudden slowdown in the campaign." Now, "Israel's Health Ministry, which is spearheading the vaccination efforts, is employing both warnings and incentives as it tries to persuade reluctant holdouts to get immunized." The ministry "has beefed up a digital task force to counter spurious claims about the vaccines, while local governments are turning to DJs and free food to lure people to vaccination centers."

Zimbabwe Receives First Shipment Of Sinopharm's COVID-19 Vaccine From China.

The AP (2/14, Mutsaka) reported, "Zimbabwe has received its first COVID-19 vaccines with the arrival early Monday of an Air Zimbabwe jet carrying 200,000 Sinopharm doses from China." This mark "one of China's first shipments of vaccines to Africa, after deliveries to Egypt and Equatorial Guinea." Notably, "the first Sinopharm vaccines are a donation from China to the southern African country." After these, "President Emmerson Mnanagagwa's government has purchased an additional 600,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine that are expected to arrive early next month, according to the state media."

No Evidence Of Community Spread Of COVID-19 In Auckland Since New Lockdown.

The AP (2/15) reports, "As people in Auckland adjusted to a new lockdown on Monday, health officials said they'd found no evidence the coronavirus had spread further in the community, raising hopes the restrictions might be short-lived."

Peru's Foreign Minister Steps Down Amid Backlash From Government Officials Secretly Getting COVID-19 Vaccine Early.

The AP (2/14, Briceño) reported, "Peru's foreign minister [Elizabeth Astete] resigned Sunday amid an uproar over government officials being secretly vaccinated against the coronavirus before the country recently received 1 million doses for health workers facing a resurgence in the pandemic."

Peruvian Prosecutors Investigating COVID-19 Vaccine "Courtesy Doses" From China.

Reuters (2/15, Aquino) reports, "Peruvian prosecutors are investigating the use of so-called 'courtesy doses; of

China's Sinopharm vaccine after two top government officials resigned over the weekend upon acknowledging they had taken the Chinese shot months ago, well before they were widely available in the country."

Italian Government Delays Opening Ski Reason Due To Coronavirus Variant.

The AP (2/14) reported, "The Italian government on Sunday abruptly delayed opening Italy's beloved ski season because a coronavirus variant was detected in a good portion of recently infected persons in the country." The health ministry "noted that analyses of virus samples indicated that a variant first found in Britain is sickening 17.8% of recently infected people in Italy."

Giving AstraZeneca's COVID-19 Vaccine To People In Italy Under 65 Is Acceptable, Official Says.

Reuters (2/15) reports, "Administering the AstraZeneca vaccine to those aged up to 65 would not be wrong, given the delays in supplies to Italy, the head of national medicines agency AIFA said on Monday."

Czech Government Declares New State Of Emergency.

The AP (2/14, Janicek) reported as the current state of emergency in the Czech Republic was set to expire, the government declared a new state of emergency on Sunday that will last for the next two weeks without the approval of the lower house of parliament that has refused the request to extend. Critics "say the government's move violates the country's Constitution," but the government "warned that the restrictions are needed to keep the country's outbreak from getting worse and causing the health system to collapse."

Germany Tightens Controls At Borders With Czechia.

The AP (2/14, Moulson) reported, "Germany on Sunday implemented tight border controls on its frontiers with the Czech Republic and Austria's Tyrol province in an effort to stem the spread of more contagious coronavirus variants." These "new restrictions that took effect at midnight limit entry from those areas to German citizens and residents, truck drivers, transport and health service workers and a few others, who have to register online and show a negative coronavirus test."

Japan Approves Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine.

The AP (2/14, Yamaguchi) reported, "Japan on Sunday formally approved its first COVID-19 vaccine," co-developed by Pfizer, "and said it would start nationwide inoculations within days, but months behind the U.S. and many other countries."

The Hill (2/12, Castronuovo, 5.69M) and Bloomberg (2/12, Du, 3.57M) also reported.

WHO Chief Urges Vigilance Against COVID-19 Despite Improving Numbers.

The AP (2/12) reported that Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, "the head of the World Health Organization, said Friday that the drop in confirmed COVID-19 infections around the world was encouraging, but cautioned against relaxing restrictions that have helped curb the spread of the coronavirus."

Johnson Planning Cautious But Irreversible Path Out Of COVID-19 Lockdown.

Reuters (2/15, Faulconbridge, Holton) reports, "British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Monday he would plot a cautious but irreversible path out of the COVID-19 lockdown this week after the vaccination of 15 million vulnerable people."

Pan-European Consortium Talking With Big Pharma To Support Late-Stage COVID-19 Vaccine Development.

Reuters (2/15, Copley) reports, "A pan-European consortium developing a COVID-19 vaccine is in talks with big pharma to support the late-stage development of its shot and ramp up manufacturing, the head of German biotech firm Leukocare told Reuters."

South Africa Approves Study Of Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 Vaccine.

Reuters (2/15, Roelf) reports, "South Africa's drugs regulator SAHPRA said on Monday it has approved an implementation study of Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine, clearing the way to start the country's first inoculations among health workers."

Pakistani Lab To Receive Sputnik V COVID-19 Vaccine Doses For Commercial Sale Soon.

Reuters (2/15, Farooq) reports, "A Pakistani lab will soon receive Russia's Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine for commercial sale, a company official said on Sunday, making Pakistan one of the first countries to market shots privately as it scrambles to secure supplies."

Mexico Receives 870,000 Doses Of AstraZeneca Vaccine.

Reuters (2/14) reported Mexico received on Sunday 870,000 doses of the two million AstraZeneca COVID vaccine doses it plans to import from India. At a news conference, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said, "The vaccines are already available...and they will not stop arriving so that the national vaccination plan does not stop."

Pfizer Not Planning Herd Immunity Study In Iceland Due To Its Declining COVID-19 Infection Rate.

Bloomberg (2/15, Brown, Sigurdardottir, 3.57M) reports, "A push by Iceland to get Pfizer Inc.'s backing for a nationwide study on the ability of vaccines to quickly create herd immunity has run into" the issue that the "tiny island nation has done too good a job keeping Covid-19 in check." As Iceland's "new infections declined, Pfizer came to the conclusion that there were too few cases in Iceland to support such a study, they said."

UK Unprepared To Deliver Key Public Messages At Start Of Pandemic, Former Adviser Says.

Bloomberg (2/15, 3.57M) reports that "the U.K. lacked the skills and resources to deliver key messages to the public at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, with potentially 'deadly consequences,' according to Prime Minister Boris Johnson's former special adviser [Dominic Cummings]." He "said in a witness statement that the Cabinet Office, the Department of Health and Social Care, Public Health England and the National Health Service were ill-equipped to communicate with citizens when the virus started spreading rapidly a year ago."

UK Government Pressured To Reopen Schools Slowly Next Month.

Bloomberg (2/15, 3.57M) reports, "The U.K. government is facing pressure from scientists and teaching unions to reopen schools slowly next month, amid fears that getting all pupils back at once could fuel a resurgence in the pandemic." Prime Minister Boris Johnson confirmed yesterday "that reopening schools from March 8 is the priority as the government considers how to ease virus restrictions, but said ministers have not yet decided if all age groups will return to classrooms at the same time."

Keeping Schools Open Without Masks, Quarantines Doubled Swedish Teachers' COVID-19 Risk, Study Finds.

Science (2/15, 484K) reports, "A careful analysis of health data from Sweden suggests that keeping schools open with only minimal precautions in the spring roughly doubled teachers' risk of being diagnosed with the pandemic coronavirus." The results show "their partners faced a 29% higher risk of becoming infected than partners of teachers who shifted to teaching online." Additionally, "parents of children in school were 17% more likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19 than those whose children were in remote learning."

Many Claim Strict European Lockdowns Brought Down R Value Of COVID-19.

The Washington Post (2/13, Taylor, 10.52M) reported that on Friday the British government announced that the R number for COVID-19 "had dropped to between 0.7 and 0.9 this week, finally below 1 for the first time since July 2020." Many people "were quick to point out what they thought the cause was: a longer, stricter government lockdown in place since early January." Elsewhere in the world, particularly Europe, "other nations appear to be having similar successes against fast-spreading variants like B.1.1.7, the variant first found in Britain."

Italian Venture Looking To Boost Production Of COVID-19 Shots Faces Shortages Of Key Supplies.

The Washington Post (2/13, Harlan, Pitrelli, 10.52M) reported that for vaccine manufacturers hoping to address supply gaps, "the path is at least as tricky as it was for the first-comers." Similar to many others, the Italy-based venture "ReiThera faces the challenge of quickly scaling up production...but it also faces a series of more novel obstacles, related to this particular point in the pandemic, when larger pharmaceutical companies have claimed dibs on crucial supplies and the existence of effective vaccines raises ethical questions about testing new ones." Even "now, even as Italian politicians speak hopefully about having a domestically made vaccine by September, ReiThera acknowledges it is still trying to navigate long waiting lists for several basic components."

WPost: China's Reassurances On Coronavirus Origins Are Insufficient.

A Washington Post (2/12, 10.52M) editorial said that while the WHO "correctly set out last year to identify the origins of the coronavirus that first broke out in China," the organization's researchers took the country at its word that "the pandemic virus did not come from its laboratories. Such a reassurance is entirely insufficient." The Post suggests the WHO "establish a new team with the right skills to drill down on the unanswered questions" with respect to the possibility the virus came from a lab. It also urges greater investigation of "the possibility that the virus originated in an animal species, and reached people via an intermediate host."

Some Europeans Balk At Getting AstraZeneca's COVID-19 Vaccine They Perceive As Less Effective.

The AP (2/13, Gera, Winfield) reported, "As AstraZeneca shots are rolling out to European Union nations this month, joining the Pfizer and Moderna doses already available, some people are balking at being offered a vaccine that they perceive – fairly or not – as second-best." Compounding "AstraZeneca's troubles have been criticism from the EU about delivery shortages, its lack of approval yet in the U.S., and a preliminary study that raised questions about the vaccine's ability to combat a COVID-19 variant discovered in South Africa." However, it does benefit from the fact that its vaccine "is cheaper and can be stored at refrigerator temperatures – not the far colder temperatures required of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines."

India Using COVID-19 Vaccine Supply To Boost Diplomatic Ties.

The Wall Street Journal (2/12, Trofimov, Bellman, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reported that India, along with China and Russia, is looking to boost its diplomatic ties and international influence through its manufacturing capacity supply COVID-19 vaccines.

China Sends 200,000 Sinopharm Doses To Zimbabwe.

The AP (2/14, Mutsaka) reported, "Zimbabwe has received its first COVID-19 vaccines with the arrival early Monday of an Air Zimbabwe jet carrying 200,000 Sinopharm doses from China." This "is one of China's first shipments of vaccines to Africa, after deliveries to Egypt and Equatorial Guinea." The article said Zimbabweán Vice President Constantino Chiwenga lauded China's swiftness in providing assistance amid the pandemic.

Brazil Confirms Cases Of UK Coronavirus Strain.

Reuters (2/14, Mano, Brito) reported, "Brazil has confirmed cases of the UK variant of the novel coronavirus in two states and in the federal district of Brasília, according to a statement from the health ministry on Sunday." The country "has the world's highest number of coronavirus deaths after the United States and more than 9.8 million confirmed cases. A Brazilian variant of the virus is circulating in 10 states, the health ministry said."

Guinea Health Officials Declare New Ebola Outbreak.

The Washington Post (2/14, Paquette, 10.52M) reported, "Public health officials in Guinea declared a new epidemic of Ebola on Sunday after recording seven cases and three deaths – the first resurgence since the hemorrhagic fever devastated the West African nation and two neighbors from 2014 to 2016." There were more than 11,300 deaths "in the last outbreak, the deadliest on record, which started in a rural Guinea village before tearing through Liberia and Sierra Leone."

The New York Times (2/14, Kwai, Maclean, 20.6M) reported the three deaths "were among seven people who fell ill with symptoms including diarrhea, vomiting and bleeding after attending the burial of a nurse in the country's southeast on Feb. 1." Officials "asked people to report any further symptoms to the health authorities and to follow hygiene and prevention measures," and promised to "accelerate delivery of vaccines to the region and open a center to deal with detected cases."

Also reporting are the Wall Street Journal (2/15, Bariyo, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), the AP (2/15, Petesch), Reuters (2/15, Samb), The Hill (2/14, Wilson, 5.69M), NPR (2/14, Schwartz, 3.69M), Forbes (2/15, Drake, 10.33M), and Axios (2/15, Falconer, 1.26M).

Congo Begins Ebola Vaccination Campaign.

Reuters (2/15, Mahamba) reports the Democratic Republic of Congo has started an ebola vaccination campaign in Butembo, the WHO announced on Monday. The country "has confirmed four cases of Ebola since a resurgence of the virus was announced on Feb. 7 in" the city. Last week, "1,200 doses of Ebola vaccine and cold chain equipment arrived in the city, according to the WHO."

Cuba Struggles With Access To Clean Running Water.

The New York Times (2/15, Derks, 20.6M) details the daily, "coordinated effort" across Cuba "to provide clean water" to citizens. Over half of Cuba's "available drinking water is lost through its leaky and antiquated pipelines," and the country relies on a primarily "analog, labor-intensive solution" to ensure everything is in working order. The infrastructure problems "have been compounded by droughts and rising temperatures" in recent years, meaning "running water is available only sporadically" for much of the population.

HHS in the News

CDC Releases New Guidelines For Reopening Schools.

In a front-page article, the New York Times (2/12, A1, Mandavilli, Taylor, Goldstein, 20.6M) reported on Friday, the CDC recommended that "K-12 schools be reopened as soon as possible, and it offered a step-by-step plan to get students back in classrooms and to resolve a debate dividing communities across the nation." These "guidelines highlight growing evidence that schools can open safely if they use measures designed to slow the coronavirus's spread." The CDC "said that even in communities with high transmission rates, elementary-school students may receive at least some in-person instruction safely." CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky stated, "C.D.C.'s operational strategy is grounded in science and the best available evidence."

The Washington Post (2/12, Meckler, 10.52M) reported that the CDC said "schools can safely open as long as a range of precautions are in place." These "much-anticipated guidelines land in the middle of an emotional debate underway in many communities and nationally. Some parents are desperate for schools to reopen, and many experts worry about the impact of remote schooling on children." However, "many teachers and parents are frightened by the prospect of youths going back."

USA Today (2/12, Garrison, 12.7M) reported that these "guidelines – billed as a 'road map' and a 'one-stop shop' to safely reopen schools – are not federal mandates but rather 'recommendations based on the best-available evidence.'" Walensky said, "There's more science to rely on, and we've learned a lot from that science. ... I can assure you this is free from political meddling." She explained that "teacher vaccinations can be an 'additional layer of protection' but made clear it isn't a necessity. 'The science has demonstrated that schools can reopen safely prior to all teachers being vaccinated.'"

On its front page, the Wall Street Journal (2/12, A1, McKay, Koh, Lucey, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reported that under the guidelines, teachers would have to wear masks at all times, and practice social distancing. Students would be assigned to small groups, and would not be allowed to interact with each other.

The Los Angeles Times (2/12, Blume, 3.37M) reported that other "mitigation strategies" include "frequent hand washing, cleaning and ventilating school facilities, and contact tracing, isolation and quarantine protocols." In addition, the CDC "described a four-tiered system for reopening based on the number of daily new cases in a community over the last seven days, and the percentage of tests that came back positive over the same time period. To be in the lowest tier would require a community to have fewer than 9 new cases per 100,000 people in the last seven days and a positive-test rate of less than 5%."

The AP (2/12, Binkley, Stobbe) reported that this "new guidance includes many of the same measures previously backed by the CDC, but it suggests them more forcefully. It emphasizes that all of the recommendations must be implemented strictly and consistently to keep school safe." In addition, it "provides more detailed suggestions about what type of schooling should be offered given different levels of virus transmission, with differing advice for elementary, middle and high schools."

Bloomberg (2/12, LaVito, 3.57M) reported, "Whether students should physically attend school has been among the most contentious issues of the U.S. pandemic response." The article added that even if schools reopen, parents are still faced with the dilemma of whether or not to allow their children to return to in-person instruction.

CNN (2/12, Howard, Cohen, 89.21M) reported that the guidelines "include a color-coded chart to describe levels of transmission from blue for low transmission, to yellow for moderate, to orange for substantial and then to red for high transmission." On Friday, President Biden said "the new CDC guidelines provide 'the best available scientific evidence' on how to reopen schools safely, which remains one of his goals."

In a separate article, CNN (2/12, McPhillips, 89.21M) reported that some "89% of children in the US live in a county considered a red zone with high levels of Covid-19 transmission under new school opening guidelines shared by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday, according to a CNN analysis of federal data."

Among other news outlets covering the story were Reuters (2/12, Borter, Renshaw), another Reuters (2/12, Beech, Hunnicutt) article, ABC News (2/12, Flaherty, Tatum, 2.44M), CBS News (2/12, Cook, Erickson, 5.39M), CNBC (2/12, Feuer, 7.34M), Politico (2/12, Perez, 6.73M), The Hill (2/12, Sullivan, 5.69M), Forbes (2/12, Beer, 10.33M), NPR (2/12, Turner, Kamenetz, Keith, 3.69M), US News & World Report (2/12, Camera, 1.91M), the New York Post (2/12, Nelson, 7.45M), the Philadelphia Inquirer (2/12, Hanna), the Atlanta Journal-Constitution (2/13, Tagami, 1.46M), Vox (2/12, Lopez, 1.88M), the Financial Times (2/12, Stacey, Subscription Publication, 1.48M), the Asbury Park (NJ) Press (2/12, Strupp, 388K), the Washington Examiner (2/12, Hogberg, 888K), and the Daily Caller (2/15, Ginsberg, 375K).

ACA Support Groups Fear Lack Of Funding May Prevent Their Ability To Help Consumers.

The Wall Street Journal (2/15, Armour, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports some ACA support groups are worried about the reopening of Affordable Care Act health insurance enrollment on federal exchanges, fearing they may not get additional funding to meet any new demand, which may hamper their ability to assist consumers in choosing coverage. The Journal mentioned a CMS spokeswoman didn't respond to questions about further funding for navigators.

The Washington Post (2/12, Goldstein, 10.52M) reported, "After promising to launch a $50 million campaign to draw attention to an extra shopping period for Affordable Care Act health plans that starts Monday, the Biden administration has been slow to disclose details of its outreach strategy and is providing no assistance to

community groups that coach consumers to sign up for coverage." A CMS news release on Friday "furnished no fresh detail." Meanwhile, "a senior official at the Department of Health and Human Services, speaking on the condition of anonymity Friday evening to discuss information that had not been made public, said the agency is working quickly to set up the enrollment period within weeks of the president's order."

CNN (2/15, Luhby, 89.21M) reports that "the Biden administration is pouring $50 million into outreach and education, though it has not provided many details on its advertising campaign or announced additional funds for enrollment assistance." According to a CMS news release issued Friday, "the marketing efforts will focus in particular on groups that have had less access to health coverage and greater disparities in health outcomes, including communities of color." CNN adds, "Biden has yet to announce his pick to head the agency, which runs the federal exchange, and his choice for Health and Human Services Secretary, Xavier Becerra, has yet to be confirmed by the Senate." According to CNN, "Covered California, which saw a record 1.6 million people selecting 2021 plans for coverage starting January 1, intends to spend $6 million for its upcoming special sign up session, which will also run through May 15."

Also reporting are the AP (2/15, Murphy), the Washington Times (2/12, 626K), and Axios (2/15, Rummler, 1.26M).

Former Trump Health Aide Exploring Bid For US House Seat.

Politico (2/12, Cancryn, 6.73M) reported, "The former chief of staff of the Trump administration's health department," Brian Harrison, "is exploring a bid for the U.S. House seat of the late Rep. Ron Wright (R-Texas), who died earlier this week after being diagnosed with Covid-19, six people familiar with the situation told POLITICO." According to Politico, "if he opts in, it would mark a quick return to politics after a tenure as one of ex-Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar's most trusted aides." Politico said Harrison "alienated some staff at agencies under HHS' umbrella, like the Food and Drug Administration and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services," and "several privately blamed him for failing to defuse tensions between Azar and CMS Administrator Seema Verma, whose feud escalated to a point that then-Vice President Mike Pence was forced to broker peace between them."

Some Calling For Senators To Hold Confirmation Hearing For Biden's HHS Secretary Nominee.

Inside Health Policy (2/12, Mills-Gregg, Subscription Publication) reported in a paywalled article, "Senators should hold a confirmation hearing for President Joe Biden's HHS Secretary nominee [Xavier] Becerra once they return later this month from break, former HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, among others, demanded in a press call Friday (Feb. 12), pointing out additional appointments to CMS and other agencies can't be filled until the secretary is in place."

Former HHS Secretary Sebelius Stresses Need For Americans To "Stay Vigilant" During Pandemic.

Yahoo! Finance (2/12, Smith) reported, "With new COVID-19 infections in the U.S. declining, former United States Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius stresses that Americans need to stay vigilant as scientists 'learn more about this virus each day.'" Sebelius told Yahoo Finance Live on Thursday, "We need to keep doing the things that we know work because we're on a much more optimistic path than we were a month

ago." Although "many Americans remain skeptical of COVID-19 vaccines, a CDC study published this week shows confidence is rising." This "study found that as of December, 49.1% of Americans are 'absolutely certain or very likely' to be vaccinated, up from just 39.4% in September."

Commentary Outlines Steps To Help Businesses Reduce Risk Of Regulatory Action By State AGs Amid Pandemic.

In an opinion piece for Bloomberg Law (2/16, Subscription Publication, 4K), Cozen O'Connor partners Maria Colsey Heard and Ann-Marie Luciano "explain what steps businesses should take to respond" to the goal of state attorneys general of accelerating "their workplace enforcement efforts" amid the pandemic, which "is reshaping the issues businesses must consider to avoid regulatory risk." The authors say "businesses should provide written Covid-19 health and safety protocols for employees, customers, and other visitors to their premises governing" multiple things, including PPE use and "employee health screening and vaccination policies." The authors outline steps to "help mitigate the risk of regulatory action by AGs as well as help businesses generate goodwill." HHS Secretary Nominee Xavier Becerra is mentioned.

CDC Director Discusses UK Coronavirus Variant, School Reopening During Interviews.

On CBS' Face The Nation (2/14, 3.14M), CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky discussed the more contagious, potentially deadlier UK coronavirus variant, B.1.1.7, and the impact it could have on school reopening, saying, "There are over a thousand B.1.1.7 cases that we have documented in this country in 39 states. We estimate now that about four percent of disease in this country is related to B.1.1.7, and we have projections it may be the dominant strain by the end of March. The amount of disease in school is very much related to the amount of disease that's in the communities. So the work that we do to decrease the amount of disease in our communities is that much more benefit to getting our schools reopened." She added, "So what we know from the literature, from the scientific literature, is that most disease transmission does not happen in the walls of the school."

On NBC's Meet The Press (2/14, 2.28M), Walensky discussed the same issue, saying, "I think we have to watch this very, very carefully. We've known now that this B.1.1.7 variant that came from the UK. ... We know the early data have demonstrated that it's around 40 percent to 50 percent more transmissible. Already that means we're likely to have more cases and more deaths from this. Now these early data that have come from a prior set of early data have suggested there might, in fact, be increased morbidity and mortality. All of it is really – wraps up into we can't let our guard down. We have to continue wearing masks. We have to continue with our current mitigation measures and we have to continue getting vaccinated as soon as that vaccine is available to us." In addition, Walensky addressed questions about the new school reopening guidelines which the CDC released.

Walensky also said on CNN's State Of The Union (2/14, 826K), "Really what we have said in our guidance is that the amount of classroom activity really depends on the amount of disease in the community. We know that the amount of disease in the community is completely reflected as to what's happening in school. If there is more disease in the community, there will be more disease in school, and that most disease in school does not come from in-school transmission, but comes from the community. So, what we would advocate for is to have more kids in schools as our community spread comes down."

CDC Director Says It Is Too Early To Lift Mask Mandates.

Reuters (2/14, Goldberg) reported on Sunday, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said "it is 'absolutely' too soon to lift mask mandates, citing daily COVID-19 case numbers that despite recent declines remain more than double the levels seen last summer." Her "warning that face-covering requirements are still critical came just days after governors in Iowa and Montana lifted long-standing mask mandates in their states." On NBC's "Meet the Press," she "said preventing further surges of infection is key to safely reopening schools and regaining some level of social normalcy until collective COVID-19 immunity can be achieved through mass vaccinations."

Bloomberg (2/14, Dlouhy, Sebenius, 3.57M) reported Walensky "warned Americans not to get complacent about rapidly falling coronavirus cases as a potentially more lethal variant spreads in the U.S." She explained that the UK variant "is around 40% to 50% more transmissible, meaning 'we're likely to have more cases and more deaths from this,' and early data 'have suggested there might in fact be increased morbidity and mortality.'"

CNBC (2/14, Newburger, 7.34M) reported Walensky made similar comments during an appearance on CBS' "Face the Nation," saying, "We still have 100,000 cases a day. We still have somewhere between 1,500 and 3,500 deaths per day. ... And yet we see some communities relaxing some of their mitigation strategies. We are nowhere out of the woods."

Among other news outlets covering the story were Politico (2/14, Naranjo, 6.73M), The Hill (2/14, Budryk, 5.69M), Fox News (2/14, Aitken, 23.99M), the New York Daily News (2/14, Shahrigian, 2.51M), the New York Post (2/14, Salo, 7.45M), and the Washington Times (2/14, Lovelace, 626K).

Biden Administration Accused Of Throwing CDC Director "Under The Bus."

The Daily Caller (2/12, Lancaster, 375K) reported that the Biden Administration "threw the director of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under the bus after she suggested that teachers could return to classrooms before being vaccinated." Earlier this month, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said, "There is increasing data to suggest that schools can safely reopen and that safe reopening does not suggest that teachers need to be vaccinated in order to reopen safely. ... Vaccination of teachers is not a prerequisite for the safe reopening of schools." Yet, later the same day, White House press secretary Jen Psaki told "reporters that the CDC Director's comments were not official guidance and that she was speaking in her 'personal capacity.'"

CDC Says It Currently Has No Plans To Mandate COVID-19 Tests For Domestic Flights.

The Washington Post (2/12, Aratani, 10.52M) reported the CDC has said it "will not require domestic travelers to show proof that they have tested negative for the coronavirus before boarding flights, a measure that had drawn vocal opposition from airline industry." The agency stated on Friday, "At this time, CDC is not recommending required point of departure testing for domestic travel. ... As part of our close monitoring of the pandemic, in particular the continued spread of variants, we will continue to review public health options for containing and mitigating spread of COVID-19 in the travel space."

The AP (2/12, Miller, Koenig) reported that the executives "of several major U.S. airlines met online Friday with White House officials to press their case against requiring coronavirus tests for passengers on domestic flights, saying it would undermine the already fragile industry." The discussion was scheduled "after Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said that a testing requirement before domestic flights was under consideration."

According to Reuters (2/12, Shepardson, Holland), "White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said at a briefing on Friday that 'reports that there is an intention to put in place new requirements, such as testing, are not accurate.'"

Among other news outlets covering the story were the Wall Street Journal (2/12, Sider, Siddiqui, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), Bloomberg Law (2/12, Wingrove, Schlangenstein, Subscription Publication, 4K), CNN (2/13, Mascarenhas, Cohen, 89.21M), Fox News (2/15, Puhak, 23.99M), The Hill (2/14, Mastrangelo, 5.69M), Forbes (2/12, Heeb, 10.33M), and Axios (2/12, 1.26M).

US Initiative To Vaccinate Nursing Home Residents, Staff Against Coronavirus To Be Completed A Month Late.

Bloomberg (2/12, Armstrong, 3.57M) reported, "A U.S. program to vaccinate nursing home residents and staff is moving slowly toward completion in the coming weeks, with the goal of wrapping up the effort by late next month." The federal government contracted with large pharmacy chains in order "to speed vaccines to the most vulnerable people in the U.S." However, "disruptions over the winter holidays and the challenge of going from facility to facility vaccinating older people have added at least a month to the timeline." Ruth Link-Gelles, who leads the effort for the CDC, stated, "This is not mass vaccination, and there were some misconceptions going into it by the public that we would sweep through thousands of homes in a week. ... It's plodding along from room to room; it just takes time."

Former Education Secretary Says It Is A "Scandal" For Schools To Still Be Shut Down.

Fox News (2/15, Lanum, 23.99M) reports "former Secretary of Education Dr. Bill Bennet said Monday 'it is a scandal' for many major public schools in the U.S. to continue to be shut down under President Joe Biden's administration." Bennett said, "It's true now that a lot of kids may not see classrooms until September. ... This is a catastrophe for these kids, and there's no beating around the bush on this." He "asserted that the U.S. could have a 'lost generation' of children who will suffer academically, socially, and morally if a plan to return them to the classroom is not created soon." CDC Director Rochelle Walensky is quoted as saying, "There is more spread that is happening in the community when schools are not open than when schools are open."

Republicans Urge Biden To Help Reopen Schools.

The New York Post (2/15, Nelson, 7.45M) reports "Republicans on Monday continued to press President Biden to use his influence to help reopen schools, pointing out that government scientists say virtually all schools can reopen safety – even in hard-hit areas if COVID-19 tests are used." Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) said on Twitter, "The CDC says it's safe to open schools. So why does the 'party of science' want to keep schools closed?" Meanwhile, Rep. Nancy Mace (R-SC) wrote, "The science is unequivocally clear: Schools are safe to reopen. But instead of following the science, the Biden administration is caving to teachers' unions. This is irresponsible & unacceptable." The Post adds that "CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said early this month that schools can safely reopen even without teacher vaccination."

Scientists Split On Why COVID-19 Infections Are Dropping In US.

The Washington Post (2/14, Thebault, 10.52M) reported that in the US, "the rate of newly recorded" COVID-19 "infections is plummeting from coast to coast and the worst surge yet is finally relenting. But scientists are split on

why, exactly, it is happening." Some scientists "point to the quickening pace of coronavirus vaccine administration, some say it's because of the natural seasonal ebb of respiratory viruses and others chalk it up to social distancing measures." CDC Director Rochelle Walensky "said in a round of TV interviews Sunday morning that behavior will be crucial to averting yet another spike in infections and that it is far too soon for states to be rescinding mask mandates."

Model Projects 130,000 Additional US Deaths From COVID-19 Over Next Three And A Half Months.

CNN (2/14, Maxouris, Andone, 89.21M) reported "a grim new forecast confirms what experts have been warning amid declining Covid-19 cases and hospitalizations: when it comes to the pandemic, the United States is not yet out of the woods." An additional "130,000 Americans are projected to die of the virus over the next three and a half months, according to the latest model from the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation." Although "Covid-19 numbers may be trending in the right direction now, there are four key factors that will determine how the next few months unfold, the institute said in a briefing accompanying its model." CNN added that "on Sunday, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky emphasized the need for masks and other mitigation measures to safely reopen" schools.

COVID-19 Vaccine Makers, Regulators Deciding On Making Updates To Vaccines.

The AP (2/15, Neergaard) reports, "The makers of COVID-19 vaccines are figuring out how to tweak their recipes against worrisome virus mutations – and regulators are looking to flu as a blueprint if and when the shots need an update." Former FDA vaccine chief Norman Baylor said, "When do you pull the trigger? ... This is a moving target right now." The article adds that "many of the new COVID-19 vaccines are made with new, flexible technology that's easy to upgrade." To make the decision, a "surveillance and testing network to flag the mutations that matter," similar to that for influenza, may be necessary.

Gottlieb Argues Biden Administration Should Undertake More "Bespoke" Efforts In Coronavirus Vaccine Campaign.

CBS News (2/14, Quinn, Tillett, 5.39M) reported that former FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb "suggested Sunday the Biden administration undertake more 'bespoke' efforts to ensure coronavirus vaccines are getting into the arms of Americans in underserved communities." Gottlieb argued, "I would be taking the federal resources and the state resources and creating more bespoke solutions that can be used in some of the hard-to-reach environments, some of the underserved communities, whether you can move mobile vans into those communities, try to work through community groups, local providers, church groups, community health centers to try to get harder-to-reach populations vaccinated." He added that the Administration should invest in a diverse set of protocols to help make sure Americans receive the vaccine.

Experts Warn Of Possible Fourth Wave Of Coronavirus As Governors Loosen Restrictions.

USA Today (2/16, Weintraub, 12.7M) reports public health experts are warning about a possible fourth wave of coronavirus cases as many governors work to loosen social distancing restrictions. Former FDA acting chief scientist Dr. Luciana Borio said, "It's like we're trying our best to help the virus rather than stopping it." More

contagious variants of the virus "have all arrived in the U.S., and one first identified in the United Kingdom is likely to be dominant here by the end of next month, according to the" US CDC.

Biden Administration Moves To Roll Back Medicaid Work Requirements.

The New York Times (2/12, Kliff, Sanger-Katz, 20.6M) reported, "The Biden administration is beginning to roll back a signature Trump administration health policy goal of requiring people to work to receive Medicaid coverage." These "work requirements, a longstanding conservative goal, were a policy priority for Seema Verma, who ran the federal Medicaid program under President Trump." According to the Times, "Medicaid waivers are discretionary, and they can be easily withdrawn by the secretary of Health and Human Services." In Verma's last weeks in office, "she invited states to sign a short contract offering them a more lengthy review process, and guaranteeing at least nine months of notice before a waiver could be withdrawn," but "in a second letter to states Friday, the acting administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services told them she was rescinding Ms. Verma's offer, saying its new procedures did not provide the agency with enough 'flexibility.'"

The AP (2/12, Jaffe) reported that a Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services statement "highlighted the coronavirus pandemic – with high unemployment exacerbating the public health crisis – as a key concern in ensuring Americans face no roadblocks to getting health care."

Bloomberg Law (2/13, Brown, Subscription Publication, 4K) reported, "Section 1115 of the Social Security Act allows the HHS to waive Medicaid rules to permit states to try out new approaches to serving beneficiaries. Seven states have work requirement waiver proposals pending with the HHS, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation."

The Hill (2/12, Sullivan, 5.69M) reported, "The Biden administration sent letters to states that had previously been approved for work requirements informing them that the federal government is moving to revoke the waivers that had been granted allowing the policy." These letters from CMS said "the agency has 'preliminarily' determined to revoke the policy and gives the states 30 days to provide information contesting the decision." According to The Hill, "The Trump administration allowed states to apply for waivers to imposed work requirements in the Medicaid program for the first time, a major conservative twist on the health insurance program for the poor," and "officials led by Trump's Medicaid chief Seema Verma argued the move helped lift people out of poverty."

Also reporting were CNN (2/12, Luhby, 89.21M), Modern Healthcare (2/12, Subscription Publication, 215K), and the HuffPost (2/12, 363K).

Biden Administration Pulls Back Approval Of Georgia Governor's Medicaid Overhaul. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (2/13, Bluestein, 1.46M) reported, "The Biden administration pulled back approval of Gov. Brian Kemp's plan to provide Medicaid coverage to thousands of low-income and uninsured adults in Georgia who meet a work or activity requirement because the still-raging coronavirus pandemic makes meeting some of the key guidelines 'unfeasible.'" On Friday, federal health officials said "the state's Medicaid overhaul proposal was switched from 'approved' to 'pending' over concerns that it's 'unreasonably difficult or impossible for many individuals to meet the community engagement requirement' in the plan in the midst of a global coronavirus outbreak." The letter "sent to state officials by Elizabeth Richter, the acting administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services," said, "Taking into account the totality of circumstances, CMS has preliminarily determined that allowing work and other community engagement requirements to take effect in Georgia would not promote the objectives of the Medicaid program."

Biden Reestablishes White House Office Of Faith-Based And Neighborhood Partnerships.

The AP (2/14, Jaffe) reported, "President Biden signed an executive order Sunday relaunching a White House office aimed at fostering cooperation between the federal government and faith-based and secular community organizations." This "order reestablishes the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships." According to the White House, "the office's early goals under Biden will include working to 'address the COVID-19 pandemic and boost economic recovery; combat systemic racism; increase opportunity and mobility for historically disadvantaged communities; and strengthen pluralism.'"

Bloomberg (2/14, 3.57M) reported Biden said in a statement, "There are not Democrats or Republicans dying from this pandemic, or losing their jobs, going hungry and facing eviction in this economic crisis, or facing the sting of systemic racism or the brunt of the climate crisis. They are fellow human beings. They are fellow Americans."

The Hill (2/14, Choi, 5.69M) reported, "Melissa Rogers will reassume the position she held in the Obama administration as executive director of the office and as senior director for faith and public policy as part of the White House Domestic Policy Council. White House Senior Adviser for Public Engagement John Dickson will serve as deputy director of the office." Meanwhile, Trey Baker "will serve as the office's liaison to Black communities."

WHO Director-General Says He Discussed US Participation In COVAX With CDC Director.

Reuters (2/12, Nebehay, Farge) reported that on Friday, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said "he had discussed U.S. support for its vaccine-sharing programme COVAX in a call with the head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention." He tweeted, "I so appreciated today's call with CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky on our organizations' enduring partnership."

National Front Page News

Headlines From Today's Front Pages.

Wall Street Journal:

Borrowing Binge Reaches Riskiest Companies
In Texas, Winter Storm Forces Rolling Power Outages As Millions Are Without Electricity
The US Bought Rapid Covid-19 Tests To Help Control The Virus. Now Many Are Unused.
Ban On New Foreign Workers Left US Jobs Unfilled, Even In Covid Downturn
A Twinge Of Envy When Only One Spouse Gets The Covid Vaccine

New York Times:

Biden And The Fed Leave 1970s Inflation Fears Behind
Icy Storm Barrels Across Central US, Leaving Millions Without Power
Pennsylvania GOP's Push For More Power Over Judiciary Raises Alarms
Adam Kinzinger's Lonely Mission
Covid-Linked Syndrome In Children Is Growing And Cases Are More Severe

A Black Soldier's Heroism, Overlooked In 1965, May Finally Be Lauded In 2021

Washington Post:
Plagues And Extremism Part Of Ancient Pattern
1 In 20 State And City Jobs Slashed
Panel Will Investigate Capitol Riot, Pelosi Says
Top Donor Sues Group Probing 2020 Vote
'Tomorrow I'll Start To Feel Better'
Storm Goes Deep With Cold, Snow
Financial Times:
Riskiest Borrowers Make Up Biggest Share Of Junk-Bond Deals Since 2007
Tokyo Olympic Boss's Resignation Fuels Japan Gender Equality Debate
Arnault And Mustier Join The $100BN Spac Boom

Story Lineup From Last Night's Network News:
ABC: Winter Storm; Weather Report; COVID; Impeachment; Pelosi-Capitol Investigation; NYC-Homicide Cases; Death of NFL Star; Nurse Gives Dad Valentines Gift of Being Cancer Free.
CBS: Winter Storm; Weather Report; COVID; Impeachment; Iraq-Rockets Fired; Global Vaccination Effort; Harry & Meghan Baby; Colorado-Avalanches; New Orleans-Mardi Gras.
NBC: Winter Storm; Weather Report; Pelosi-Capitol Investigation; Impeachment; COVID; New York-Nursing Home Deaths; Vaccines; COVID-High School Students; COVID-Depression; Harry & Meghan Baby; New Orleans-Mardi Gras.

Network TV At A Glance:
Winter Storm – 10 minutes, 50 seconds
COVID – 9 minutes, 5 seconds
Impeachment – 8 minutes, 30 seconds

Last Laughs

Late Night Political Humor.

Trevor Noah: "Really, Governor Cuomo? You lowered your own [nursing home death] numbers to make yourself look better? ... And the explanation for this, the explanation that they are going with, is that they thought the Trump Administration would use the high nursing home deaths against them. Which yeah. Usually if you are not doing a good job, it gets used against you. That is the whole point of data. This would be like if the Kansas City Chiefs said, 'Come on, you're going to look at the scoreboard? Isn't it enough that I'm telling you I won the Super Bowl? Come on!'"

Trevor Noah: "And when you think about it, messing with COVID numbers to make yourself look better is just about the Trumpiest thing that you can do. Which is ironic since the main reason Cuomo became a pandemic

hero is that he was giving informative, coherent press conferences while Trump was trying to get people with bleach."

Trevor Noah: "Impeachment. It's the most presidential thing Donald Trump has ever done. ... Yes, the bad news for Donald Trump is that seven members of his own party said that he was guilty. Which is unprecedented. The good news for him is that it wasn't enough. So Trump is free to go, baby! 2024, here we come! We getting the whole crew back together. Ivanka, Jared Kushner, Mike Pence – sorry about trying to get you killed. But that's in the past now. Let's do this."

Trevor Noah: "Trying to hold Trump responsible for his crimes is like trying to kill a fruit fly. It's just like, 'Ha, got it this time!' And you open your hands, and it is not even there – it is already halfway across the room sitting on your girlfriend."

Trevor Noah: "Say what you want, but Trump is the acquittal GOAT. Sorry, OJ, you had a good run, but Trump got acquitted twice and he is responsible for more deaths."

National News

Pelosi Says Congress Will Create Commission To Examine Capitol Riot.

The AP (2/15, Yen) reports House Speaker Pelosi "said Monday that Congress will establish an independent, Sept. 11-style commission to look into the deadly insurrection that took place at the U.S. Capitol." In the wake of the Jan. 6 riot, Pelosi "asked retired Army Lt. Gen. Russel Honoré to lead an immediate review of the Capitol's security process." Reuters (2/15, Shepardson) reports Pelosi said in a letter to House Democrats that based on his interim findings, she said Congress must provide funds "to provide for the safety of members and the security of the Capitol." Pelosi added, "It is clear from his findings and from the impeachment trial that we must get to the truth of how this happened." The New York Times (2/15, Cochrane, 20.6M) reports, "A group of House Republicans wrote to Ms. Pelosi on Monday complaining that she had tapped General Honoré without input from their party."

Bloomberg (2/15, House, 3.57M) says Pelosi's office "provided few other details about the proposed panel. Spokesman Drew Hammill said there was no exact timing yet for when legislation will be introduced to form the commission or when a spending bill to fund it will be advanced."

The Washington Post (2/15, Kornfield, Demirjian, DeBonis, 10.52M) says, "For Democrats, the commission may aid in holding [former President Donald Trump] accountable after the impeachment inquiry failed to convict Trump with inciting supporters during his Jan. 6 speech to stop the counting of votes for then-President-elect Joe Biden." The Wall Street Journal (2/15, Leary, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says some Democrats, and Senate Minority Leader McConnell, "have suggested...that the best venue is outside Congress." In brief reports, ABC World News Tonight (2/15, story 5, 0:50, Muir, 7.97M) and NBC Nightly News (2/15, story 3, 0:50, Holt, 6.14M) provided similar coverage, as do the websites of Fox News (2/15, Steinhauser, 23.99M) and CNN (2/15, Foran, Nobles, Grayer, 89.21M), and USA Today (2/15, King, 12.7M), The Hill (2/15, Coleman, 5.69M) and Politico (2/15, Cheney, 6.73M).

GOP Representatives Suggest Pelosi Bears Some Responsibility For Capitol Security Failures. The Cleveland Plain Dealer (2/15, 1.22M) reports Reps. James Comer (R-KY), Rodney Davis (R-IL),

Jim Jordan (R-OH), and Devin Nunes (R-CA) on Monday questioned whether Pelosi "bears some responsibility for security failures that allowed rioters" into the Capitol. Their letter to Pelosi cited reports that the House Sergeant at Arms denied a request for National Guard support "because the 'optics' of having the National Guard on site were not good and the intelligence didn't support the move," and "suggested that was done on Pelosi's behalf – something a spokesman for Pelosi said was not true." The Plain Dealer says Democrats described the Republicans' letter "as a blatantly partisan effort to deflect responsibility" for the riot.

CNN: Security Footage, Police Dispatches Show Rioters Launched A Coordinated Attack On Capitol. CNN (2/15, Wild, Herb, Foreman, 89.21M) reports on its website that "new police radio dispatches and security footage" from the riot "paint an even sharper picture of how the insurrectionists at times showed little fear of the police as they launched a large and coordinated attack." CNN says footage not presented during former President Donald Trump's impeachment trial "and reviewed by CNN offers even greater insight and revealed both the ferocity of the rioters as well as the restraint of the officers on the scene."

Biden Spent Weekend At Camp David.

The AP (2/15, Jaffe) reports under the headline "At Camp David Retreat, Biden Hangs Out, Shows He's Got Game" that after spending "his third week in office visiting the Pentagon, touring the National Institutes of Health and working on the administration's COVID-19 response," President Biden "capped it off by beating one of his granddaughters at Mario Kart during his first presidential visit to Camp David." Biden "told reporters before departing Washington for the compound that his main plans for the long weekend were to 'just hang out with the family and do what we always do.'"

CNN Examines Biden's Daily Routine. On its website, CNN (2/15, Liptak, 89.21M) takes a look "Inside The New President's Routine," writing that "as Biden settles into a job he has been seeking on-and-off for three decades, the daily routine of being president – with a phalanx of Secret Service agents, regular updates on the nation's top secrets and an ever-present press corps – has come more naturally for him than for his more recent predecessors." The President "has established a regular schedule, including coffee in the mornings with the first lady, meetings and phone calls from the Oval Office starting just after 9 a.m. and a return to his residence by 7 p.m."

Biden Administration Could Take Action On Unregulated Toxic "Forever Chemicals."

Axios (2/15, Knutson, 1.26M) reports, "Industrial 'forever chemicals' found in hundreds of consumer goods and linked to adverse health effects may face new regulations under the Biden administration." During his confirmation hearing, Biden's nominee to head the EPA, Michael Regan, told the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee that "PFAS, PFOA, perfluorinated compounds will be a top priority for this administration."

Administration Aims To Reduce Hydrofluorocarbons In Refrigeration. The Washington Post (2/15, Eilperin, Butler, 10.52M) reports that most of the "compressed refrigerants that keep perishable goods cold" in grocery stores are "hydrofluorocarbons – greenhouse gases thousands of times more powerful than carbon dioxide – which often escape through cracks or systems that were not properly installed." The Post says the Biden Administration "sees eliminating these chemicals from the nation's refrigerators as low-hanging fruit in its broader effort to rein in climate pollutants." The American Innovation and Manufacturing Act, enacted in December requires the EPA to "phase down the production and import of these potent greenhouse gases 85 percent over the next 15 years."

Gates: Biden's Goals For Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions Are Doable. USA Today (2/15, King, 12.7M) reports on an interview with Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates in which he said achieving President Biden's "ambitious goals of decarbonizing the energy sector by 2035 and attaining net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 is within reach." Gates said, "People who think a plan is impossible are wrong. It's super hard and very broad, but it's doable."

Politico (2/15, Tamborrino, 6.73M) reports Gates "says...Biden needs to go big on climate change – by fostering the major technological changes that can eliminate greenhouses throughout the economy by the middle of the century." In his book, "How to Avoid A Climate Disaster," Gates "argues that leaders need to shift their focus to long-term strategies aimed at creating a zero-carbon future." He calls for "a sharp ramp-up in research and development spending by the federal government to figure out the big stuff: eliminating the carbon footprint of things like steel, concrete, aviation and farming."

Republican Senators Who Voted To Convict Trump Face Backlash From State Parties.

All three broadcast networks once again covered the aftermath of former President Donald Trump's second impeachment trial on their evening newscasts, focusing on the fallout for Senate Republicans who voted to convict Trump. On ABC World News Tonight (2/15, story 4, 3:55, Muir, 7.84M), Rachel Scott reported Trump was "spotted giving two thumbs up" to supporters as he headed to a golf course on Monday, as "the backlash [is] only growing" against the seven Republicans who broke ranks. Lester Holt similarly said on NBC Nightly News (2/15, story 4, 2:15, 6.44M), "The seven GOP senators who voted to convict Donald Trump are facing backlash back home as he vows to continue to lead his movement."

Nancy Cordes said on the CBS Evening News (2/15, story 4, 2:20, Garrett, 4.89M) that Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) "was censured by Louisiana's Republican Party on Saturday." North Carolina's Republicans were on track to censure Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC), and Rep. Dan Bishop (R-NC) spoke to CBS in support of it. Cordes: "Sen. Burr has served North Carolina in Congress for 25 years. Doesn't he have the right to cast a vote as he sees fit?" Bishop: "I like Sen. Burr, I'm friendly with Sen. Burr, but this was an error, and the Republican Party is correct in my judgment to express that view."

The Raleigh (NC) News & Observer (2/15, 396K) reports, "In an emergency vote Monday night," the North Carolina GOP "voted unanimously" to censure Burr. Burr said, "My party's leadership has chosen loyalty to one man over the core principles of the Republican Party and the founders of our great nation." The AP (2/15) reports North Carolina GOP Chairman Michael Whatley "said in a statement Saturday that Burr's vote to convict 'in a trial that he declared unconstitutional is shocking and disappointing.'" Reuters (2/15) also reports.

The Bangor (ME) Daily News (2/15, 178K) reports the Maine Republican Party "could vote by month's end to censure" Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME). The state party "issued no statement after the senator's vote, but Maine GOP Chair Demi Kouzounas told party members in a Saturday email that 'many of you are upset after what happened today as are we' and 'to be prepared for an emergency state committee meeting in the near future' to discuss the Collins matter."

The Salt Lake (UT) Tribune (2/15, 284K) reports, "Some Utah Republicans are hoping to censure" Sen. Mitt Romney (R-UT). A motion being circulated on social media "says Romney failed to 'represent the average conservative Utah Republican voter' and 'misrepresented himself as a Republican,' when he ran for office. ... The censure motion concludes Romney used his 'senatorial power and influence to undermine' Trump and claims 'Romney appears to be an agent for the Establishment Deep State.'"

The Philadelphia Inquirer (2/15, Tamari, Seidman) reports Pennsylvania Republicans "are heaping condemnation" on Sen. Pat Toomey (R-PA) for his vote to convict, "signaling how fealty to the former president has come to define the party. Republican state party chairman Lawrence Tabas has advised committee members that he will soon call a meeting to 'address and consider actions related to the impeachment vote.'"

Reid J. Epstein of the New York Times (2/15, Epstein, 20.6M) profiles Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-IL), "one of just three House Republicans who voted both to impeach" Trump and to strip Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) of her committee assignments. He is now "unwelcome not just in his party but also in his own family, some of whom recently disowned him."

Michael Gerson writes in the Washington Post (2/15, 10.52M) that while Trump's "acquittal...brought hints of hope for the Republican future," the "dominant note of the day was still cowardice. ... In the end, we witnessed a historic collapse of moral and political leadership." Trump "has been effective in promoting the tribalism of White grievance, as well as desperation about the fate of America. And, unlike any other president, he was happy to step into an authoritarian role, attempting to maintain power through intimidation and violence."

Jennifer Rubin writes in the Washington Post (2/15, 10.52M) that "the American people have two avenues left to hold the disgraced former president accountable for inciting insurrection." Rubin adds that "criminal prosecution is still in the cards. ... The benefit of a criminal trial is that witnesses," including former Vice President Mike Pence and House Minority Leader McCarthy, "can be subpoenaed. ... The venue of the trial, Washington, might be favorable to the prosecution."

Katrina Vanden Heuvel writes in the Washington Post (2/15, 10.52M) that although Trump's "guilt is not in question," 43 Senate Republicans "refused" to convict him. Vanden Heuvel adds, "Cowed by Trump's zealous base, they cravenly choose power and privilege over responsibility and principle," and they "should be held accountable. Citizens who care about the future of this republic should come together, across lines of party and ideology, to vote out of office those who failed in their most important responsibility."

McConnell: Trump "Bears Moral Responsibility." Senate Minority Leader McConnell writes in the Wall Street Journal (2/15, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) that there is "no question former President Trump bears moral responsibility. His supporters stormed the Capitol because of the unhinged falsehoods he shouted into the world's largest megaphone. His behavior during and after the chaos was also unconscionable, from attacking [Pence] during the riot to praising the criminals after it ended." McConnell argues that the Constitution did not permit the impeachment trial, and that senators' "job was to defend the Constitution and respect its limits."

Max Boot writes in the Washington Post (2/15, 10.52M) that McConnell's "cynical skill was on full display" during Trump's trial. McConnell "voted to acquit – and then argued that Trump was guilty as charged of 'a disgraceful dereliction of duty.'" McConnell, Boot adds, "was trying to placate his own caucus – which might have overthrown him if he had voted to convict – while at the same time trying to please more moderate Republican voters and donors whose support Republicans will need to recapture the Senate in 2022."

Michelle Goldberg writes in the New York Times (2/15, 20.6M) that in his floor speech after the conviction vote, McConnell "signaled openness to Trump's prosecution in other forums" and has "stripped away some of the taboo about prosecuting a former president. In addition to the investigations of Trump's business practices in New York, prosecutors in Georgia have opened a criminal investigation into his attempts to subvert the election there. Washington's attorney general is reportedly considering charging Trump with violating a District of

Columbia law against provoking violence." In addition, the Justice Department "could look into the countless federal crimes Trump appeared to commit in office."

Colbert King writes in the Washington Post (2/15, 10.52M) that McConnell's comments on the Senate floor after the vote were "a case for a guilty verdict. He wimped out. But his words did not disappear. In fact, they would fit perfectly into a censure resolution, one that I'm sure McConnell or one of his GOP colleagues will – or should – introduce when they return to town from their recess."

Polls Show Majority Support For Conviction, But Overwhelming GOP Opposition. ABC News (2/15, 2.44M) reports on its website that an ABC News/Ipsos poll of 547 US adults (2/13-2/14) found that 58% of Americans think Trump should have been convicted, though 86% of Republicans say he should not have been. Eighty-three percent of GOP respondents "actually go even further, believing that the trial shouldn't have even happened, viewing the single charge against Trump as not serious enough to warrant impeachment proceedings." Politico (2/15, Ward, 6.73M) and The Hill (2/15, Folley, 5.69M) also cover the poll, while USA Today (2/15, Behrmann, 12.7M) reports that a Quinnipiac poll of 1,056 US adults (2/11-2/14) found that 55% of respondents said that "even though Trump was acquitted in the Senate, meaning he can run for office in 2024 if he wishes, he should not be allowed to hold elected office again. ... However, 87% of Republicans surveyed said Trump should be allowed."

Historians Say Trump Will Rank "In The Lower Tier" Of Presidents. USA Today (2/15, 12.7M) reports, "Trump's unprecedented efforts to reverse the results" of the 2020 presidential election, "his demands that supporters 'fight' before the attack Jan. 6 on the U.S. Capitol, the resulting second impeachment and the Senate trial solidified Trump's probable rank in the lower tier of the nation's 46 presidents, political analysts and historians said." Presidential historian Alvin Felzenberg said, "He's certainly in the bottom tier. Maybe at the bottom."

Dingell And Tlaib Promote Legislation To Create Local Water Fund.

In an op-ed for the Washington Post (2/15, 10.52M), Reps. Debbie Dingell (D-MI) and Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) write that while "hand-washing to prevent the spread of [COVID] may seem like a no-brainer," some of "the same governments telling people to wash their hands can still legally shut off their water if they can't afford the bill." Dingell and Tlaib write that they have "introduced a measure that would create a $1.5 billion fund for local communities to assist with paying water bills for low-income residents." The measure "would require all cities and counties to reconnect service and impose a shutoff moratorium to receive federal funding."

Millions Without Power, 150M Under Storm Warnings Across US.

The New York Times (2/15, Robertson, Krauss, Fazio, 20.6M) reports, "A massive winter storm bulldozed its way across the southern and central United States on Monday, leaving millions of people without power." The storm "was notable for its enormous reach – 150 million people were under storm warnings – and for a particularly perilous element it brought nearly everywhere: ice. It left a treacherous varnish on roads across a midsection of the country, including places where driving on ice is a rarity." In Texas, "an estimated 2.6 million homes and businesses had their power interrupted Sunday night and Monday morning because of storm damage or in rotating outages ordered by regulators."

The Houston Chronicle (2/15, 982K) reports about 500,000 of Houston utility CenterPoint's 2.5 million electric customers, were without power as of Monday morning. The AP (2/15, Stengle) reports the storm "is likely

to blame for the deaths of two people in Texas, where an unusually snowy emergency Monday knocked out power for more than four million people, shut down grocery stores and air travel and closed schools ahead of frigid days still to come."

In an editorial, the Wall Street Journal (2/15, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says that while power outages are inevitable, they have been made more likely by government policies that promote green energy at the expense of coal and nuclear power, which the Journal calls more reliable.

ABC World News Tonight (2/15, lead story, 4:25, Muir, 7.84M), the CBS Evening News (2/15, lead story, 3:40, Garrett, 4.75M), and NBC Nightly News (2/15, lead story, 2:45, Holt, 6.44M) all opened with the news. Reuters (2/15, Caspani), Bloomberg (2/15, Blas, Malik, 3.57M), the Washington Post (2/15, Craig, Bellware, 10.52M), the Wall Street Journal (2/15, Passy, Blunt, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), the Dallas Morning News (2/15, 772K), and the CNN (2/15, Ellis, Ebrahimji, Sutton, 89.21M) website are among the other outlets covering the storms.

Nevada Bill Would Replace Caucuses With First-In-The-Nation Presidential Primary.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal (2/15, 372K) reports Nevada Democrats have "unveiled a bill that would kill the state's presidential caucuses in favor of a primary system, a move that comes as the state is angling to be the first in the nation to weigh in on presidential nominees." The bill "would do away with Nevada's caucus system, which has been in place for deciding each major party's presidential nominee since 1981, and create a presidential primary that would be held on the second-to-last Tuesday in January." The Las Vegas Sun (2/15, 165K) reports the primary "would be run by the state, instead of the caucuses run by political parties, and would be a separate election from a June primary held to pick party nominees and narrow the field of candidates for federal, state and local offices." Politico (2/15, Pager, Siders, 6.73M) and The Hill (2/15, Lonas, 5.69M) also report.

McConnell Suggests He May Intervene In 2022 GOP Senate Primaries.

The Wall Street Journal (2/15, Hughes, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports Senate Minority Leader McConnell suggested in an interview that he is prepared to get involved in 2022 Republican Senate primaries in order to maximize GOP opportunities to win back control. McConnell said the goal is "getting candidates who can actually win in November."

Perdue Files Paperwork For Likely Challenge To Warnock.

The New York Times (2/15, Saul, 20.6M) reports ex-Sen. David Perdue (R-GA) "filed paperwork on Monday night indicating that he plans a comeback effort" by challenging Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-GA) in 2022. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (2/15, 1.46M) reports, "A senior Perdue adviser characterized the filing as a necessary legal step, but added that the former senator is 'leaning heavily toward' running again. If Perdue runs, the adviser said, he will decide by March 1, put together a campaign team and announce in April."

State Senator Enters Iowa GOP Senate Race; Grandson Expects Grassley To Run Again.

The Hill (2/15, Coleman, 5.69M) reports Iowa state Sen. Jim Carlin (R) entered the 2022 Senate race on Monday, even though it is unclear if 87-year-old Sen. Charles Grassley (R-IA) will seek an eighth term. WHO-TV Des Moines, IA (2/15) reports on it website that Iowa House Speaker Pat Grassley (R), the senator's grandson,

said in an interview that he expects his grandfather to run again. Pat Grassley himself may run if the incumbent does not.

Republican Schimpf Enters Illinois Gubernatorial Race.

The Chicago Tribune (2/15, Pearson, 2.03M) reports ex-state Sen. Paul Schimpf (R) entered the race for Illinois governor on Monday, saying Gov. J.B. Pritzker (D) "has lost public confidence over his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic." The Chicago Sun-Times (2/15, 970K) reports, "A U.S. Naval Academy graduate and Marine Corps veteran, Schimpf was an outspoken advocate for veterans in the Senate. In 2005, Schimpf served as the chief American advisor in the trial of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. He rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps." Schimpf is the first Republican to formally enter the race; state Sen. Darren Bailey (R) and business owner Gary Rabine are also considering bids.

GOP Donor Who Gave $2.5M For Voter Fraud Probe Sues To Get His Money Back.

The Washington Post (2/15, Boburg, Swaine, 10.52M) reports that conservative donor Fred Eshelman contributed $2.5 million to True the Vote, "a small conservative nonprofit group in Texas that was seeking to expose voter fraud" after the 2020 election. Eshelman "came to regret his donation and to doubt conspiracy theories of rampant illegal voting, according to court records and interviews," and "now, he wants his money back." Eshelman "has alleged in two lawsuits – one in federal court has been withdrawn and the other is ongoing in a Texas state court – that True the Vote did not spend his $2 million gift and a subsequent $500,000 donation as it said it would. Eshelman also alleges that True the Vote directed much of his money to people or businesses connected to the group's president, Catherine Engelbrecht."

Lincoln Project Subject Of Allegations Regarding Sexual Harassment By Weaver.

USA Today (2/15, Becker, 12.7M) reports on the Lincoln Project, which raised "nearly $90 million for its stated mission of defeating Donald Trump." The group "faces a rapidly escalating controversy over allegations that another of its co-founders, John Weaver, sexually harassed more than a dozen young men, including some working for the project."

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TO: THE SECRETARY AND SENIOR STAFF

DATE: THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2021 7:30 AM EST

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- North Carolina Alters COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Guidance, Making It Permissible To Refuse COVID-19 Vaccine To Travelers.
- Michigan Restaurants Propose Tying Indoor Capacity Limits To COVID-19 Positivity Rate.
- More Than 100K COVID-19 Vaccine Appointments Delayed In Pennsylvania.
- Massachusetts Residents Aged 65-74, Those With Underlying Health Conditions Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine.
- Massachusetts Legislators To Hold Oversight Hearings On State's COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.
- Colorado Governor Will Not Allow Denver Mayor To Administer COVID-19 Vaccine To Homeless Ahead Of Schedule.
- More Than 695K Minnesotans Have Received The COVID-19 Vaccine.
- Minnesota Governor Wants All Schools To Offer Some Form Of In-Person Learning By March 8.
- New Jersey Governor Extends Public-Health Emergency To Mid-March.
- Error Causes Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine Shortage In Pennsylvania.
- Editorial: California Governor Turns To Corporate Contacts To Roll Out COVID-19 Vaccine.
- Colorado Governor Urges Congress To Take Action On COVID-19 Stimulus Plan.
- Iowa Cancels Deal With Microsoft To Develop Centralized System For COVID-19 Vaccine Scheduling.
- Detroiters Aged 60-64 With Chronic Medical Conditions Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine.
- Connecticut Legislators Conclude 24-Hour Hearing On Vaccination Rules For Public School Children.
- Soft Launch Of Nevada's New COVID-19 Vaccine Appointment Registration System To Occur Next Week.
- Californians With Low Incomes To Receive $600 Stimulus Payment Under $9.6B COVID-19 Economic Recovery Package.
- Op-Ed: Los Angeles' Distribution Of COVID-19 Vaccines A "Confusing" Process.
- Florida Governor Defends Controversial COVID-19 Pop-Up Vaccination Clinic In Affluent Community.
- Maine AG Issues Warning Against Administering COVID-19 Vaccine To Ineligible People.
- Chicago Spent $281.5M Of $1.2B COVID-19 Pandemic Relief Money On Police Department.
- California Fines McDonald's Franchisee For Firing Workers Who Raise COVID-19 Safety Concerns.
- Nevadans Aged 65-69 Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine Next Week.
- Ohio Senate Passes Bill To Limit Governor's Health Orders.
- NYC Fixing COVID-19 Vaccine Registration System.
- Cannabis Workers, Veterinarians Receive Top Priority For COVID-19 Vaccine In California.
- Leaders In DC Area Begin Lifting Some COVID-19 Restrictions.
- Biden's Openness On Minimum Wage Negotiations May Not Please Progressives.

- Debate Over Whether $15 Minimum Wage Would Boost Workers Or Kill Jobs Rages.
- Consumers Used Stimulus Checks To Boost Economy, Retail Spending In January.
- Millions Of US Jobs Unlikely To Come Back After Pandemic, Economists Warn.
- As Democrats Work To Pass Virus Relief, Divisions Appear On Next Legislative Package.
- Democrats Face Internal Clash Over Raising Minimum Wage.
- Allies Creating Nonprofit Group To Push Bidens' Agenda.
- Opinion: Debate Over Pandemic Relief Ignoring Shifting Of Jobs From One Sector To Another.
- Opinion: Biden Relief Package Would Give Congress Time To Work On Longer-Term Answer To Health Insurance.
- IRS: Some Stimulus Checks May Still Be In The Mail.
- Biden's COVID-19 Relief Legislation Is Also An ACA Expansion Bill.
- Proposals Could Result In Universal Basic Income For Kids In US.
- COVID-19 Vaccine Collaboration Illustrates Potential Of Public-Private Partnerships, Teva Executive Says.
- HHS Signs Contract For Special Syringes To Extract Six Doses Of Pfizer Vaccine.
- UN Chief Calls For Global Vaccination Plan To Ensure Equitable COVID-19 Shot Distribution.
- Developing Countries Falling Dangerously Behind On COVID-19 Vaccinations.
- EU Says It Is On Track To Have Up To 2.6 Billion COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.
- South Africa Begins Administering J&J's COVID-19 Vaccine.
- Some European Healthcare Workers Pushing For COVID-19 Vaccines From Moderna, Pfizer Over AstraZeneca.
- Pfizer Has Yet To Deliver Roughly 10 Million COVID-19 Vaccine Doses To EU Due In December.
- Central European Leaders Push For Faster COVID-19 Vaccine Deliveries.
- Japan Launches COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign.
- Senegal To Receive 200,000 Doses Of Sinopharm's COVID-19 Vaccine.
- Britain Becomes First Country To Approve Human Challenge Trials For COVID-19.
- Britain Proposes UN Draft Resolution Calling For COVID-19 Vaccination Ceasefires.
- Turkey To Slowly Return To Normal Life On Regional Basis Starting Next Month, Erdogan Says.
- Venezuela To Start Vaccinating Medical Personnel Against COVID-19 This Week, Maduro Says.
- India Offers To Vaccinate All UN Peacekeepers Globally Against COVID-19.
- China Blocking Taiwan's Attempt To Purchase Five Million COVID-19 Doses From BioNTech, Health Minister Says.
- Israel Allows Palestinian Authority To Deliver First COVID-19 Vaccines To Gaza Strip.
- Tanzania's President Falsely Claims His Country Is "COVID-Free."
- Belgian Teachers Threaten To Strike Unless They Get Access To COVID-19 Vaccines.
- Russia, China Using COVID-19 Vaccine Supply To Boost Geopolitical Influence.
- Iran Says Its COVIran Barakat Vaccine Is "100% Effective" Against UK Coronavirus Variant.
- India's Largest Healthcare Chain Expects Private COVID-19 Vaccine Market To Open Up Within Weeks.
- South Africa Coronavirus Variant Associated With 16-Fold Increase In COVID-19 Cases In Zambia.

- Namibia Will Roll Out AstraZeneca's COVID-19 Vaccine Despite South Africa Halting Distribution Amid New Coronavirus Variant.
- COVAX-Participating Countries Will Soon Receive Information On First COVID-19 Vaccine Shipments, PAHO Says.
- Sao Paulo's Serrana Selected For Population-Wide COVID-19 Vaccination Study.
- Toronto Health Officials Want Ontario Government To Extend Lockdown.
- Mexico Pleads For Countries To Stop Hoarding COVID-19 Vaccines.
- Public Outcry Continues In Peru Over Secret COVID-19 Vaccinations Among Wealthy.
- Most Countries In Europe Ignoring Mentally Ill In COVID-19 Vaccine Plans, Groups Say.
- New COVID-19 Infections In England Fall Significantly In Recent Weeks.
- People In Brazil Getting COVID-19 Vaccines Illicitly, Then Bragging About It On Social Media.
- Federal Mask Mandate "Comes Far Too Late," Contributor Says.
- Federal Agents Have Seized More Than 10M Fake N95 Masks In Recent Weeks.
- COVID-19 Vaccines Have Potential To "Decimate" Demand For Testing.
- Opinion: Pandemic Has Made The Goal Of Individualized Education Easier To Achieve.
- Project Veritas Releases Video Of Mark Zuckerberg Raising Concerns COVID-19 Vaccines May Alter DNA.
- Many Americans Expect Coronavirus Disruptions To Last Into Second Half Of 2021, Poll Indicates.
- Mental Health Providers Stretched Thin As Demand For Services Surges.
- Fauci Says US Has Two Powerful Tools Against New Coronavirus Variants.
- Laura Ingraham Says Biden, Democrats Do Not Want America To Return To Pre-Pandemic "Normal."
- Ninety-Year-Old Woman Treks Six Miles Through Snow To Get COVID-19 Vaccine.
- Coronavirus Infections, Deaths Falling Worldwide.
- Africa Nears 100K COVID-19 Deaths.
- Canadian Researchers Urge Delay In Administering Second Dose Of Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine.
- UK Planning First Human Challenge Study For COVID-19.
- 'Horrifying' Death Toll Prompts Calls To Prioritize Jabs For Disabled.
- Opinion: Home-Delivery Of COVID-19 Vaccines To Seniors, People With Disabilities In Conflict With California's Goal Of Rapidly Increasing Inoculations.
- Opinion: American Christians Must Stand Up To Globalism, Socialists With Phrase "Bite Me."
- Analysis: Pandemic Provides Opportunity For American Healthcare System To Be Fixed.
- Analysis Highlights Takeaways From COVID-19 Vaccine "Policy Hackathon."
- Don't 'Hector' Workers Over Vaccine, Warns Top US Business Group (CDC Mentioned).
- Editorial: US COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Is More Effective Than It Might Seem.

HHS in the News

- Biden Has Reportedly Selected Former Obama Official To Lead CMS.
- Biden Administration Announces Latest Round Of HHS Appointments.
- Supreme Court Review Of Medicaid Work Rules Hinges On Verma Letters.

- Biden Administration Appears To Withdraw Final Rule On Prior Authorization.
- HHS Needs To Overhaul Value-Based Payment Approach, Report Says.
- SolarWinds Cyber-Attack Executed From Within US, White House Official Says.
- Fauci Wins Dan David Prize In "Present" Category Of Public Health.
- Fauci Lauds Maurice Hilleman, Vaccine Research Pioneer.
- NIH All Of Us Research Program Starting To Get Genetic Results Back To Participants.
- Face Masks May Serve As Humidifier, Contributor Says.
- Opinion: President Biden Should Create National Institute For Food, Nutrition And Disease Prevention.
- Woodcock Refutes Idea Of Establishing Firewall Between FDA, Drug Companies For Approvals.
- More Than 150 Democratic Congressmen Urge Court To Lift FDA's Restrictions On Prescribing Mifepristone.
- FDA Leaders Say Agency Made Mistake In Allowing COVID-19 Antibody Tests To Be Sold, Shipped Without Being Reviewed.

Opioid Crisis

- Arizona Senate Panel Approves Measure To Legalize Test Strips To Detect Fentanyl.

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- Democratic Senators Unveil Public Option Healthcare Plan.
- CBO: Dems' Plan To Temporarily Expand Health Coverage Is Expensive.
- Insurer Participation In ACA Has Grown, Fueled By Pandemic And New President, Analysis Shows.
- US Government To Spend $50M To Boost Awareness Of ACA Enrollment Extension.
- Wisconsin Governor's Budget Proposal Would Create State Health Insurance Marketplace, Public Option.
- Opinion: Without Sweeping Legislation, Congress Can Still Move US Closer To Universal Healthcare.
- South Carolina House Advances Bill That Would Ban Most Abortions.

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- Healthcare Data Breaches Rose Over 55% In 2020, Report Says.

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- Access To COVID-19 Vaccines For People With Developmental Disabilities Varies By State, County.

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- Federal Appeals Court Rejects Lawsuit Against Medicare Part B Payments Cut.

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- Pandemic Gives Biden Unexpected Opening To Cut Deals With Red States On Medicaid.
- Nearly 70% Of Alabamians Support Expanding Medicaid In State.
- Column: Biden Administration Tosses Medicaid Work Requirements On Policy Trash Heap.

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• Inspector General Report Says HUD Has Neglected To Enforce Environmental Regulations, Potentially Jeopardizing Health Of Thousands.
• Flu Season Has Been Virtually Nonexistent.
• Former Theranos Official To Testify That Company's Leaders Rejected Idea That Blood-Testing Technology Was Not Accurate Enough.
• If Woman Has Heart Health Factors While Pregnant, Her Child May Have Poor Heart Health Years Later, Study Suggests.
• Airlines Ban Emotional-Support Animals, But Trained Service Dogs Can Fly For Free.
• Gates Foundation, Novartis Join Forces To Develop Gene Therapy To Cure Sickle Cell Disease.
• STAT Profiles Truveta Which Aims To Sell De-Identified Medical Data To Answer Questions.
• Bluebird Bio Suspends Operations Of Gene Therapy For Sickle Cell Disease After Two More Cancer Diagnoses.
• Study Adds To Mounting Evidence That Synonymous Variants Can Have Consequences.
• Utah Bill Attempts To Undo Some Vaping Restrictions.
• Indian River County May Raise Legal Age To Buy Tobacco To 21.
• Vermont Lawmakers Considering Ban On Sales Of Flavored Cigarettes, E-Cigarettes.
• Arizona Lawmakers Considering Bill Allowing Women To Skip Trip To Physician's Office To Obtain Birth Control.
• GSK, Vir Biotechnology To Expand Partnership To Develop Therapies For Diseases Beyond COVID-19.
• Opinion Offers Advice On Shifting The Drug Development Paradigm For Rare Diseases.
• FDA Recalls Lots Of Capsules Containing Undeclared Sildenafil, Tadalafil.
• North Carolina Man Pleads Guilty To Distributing Unapproved Drugs After Selling Fake Diet Pills.
• San Francisco Biotechnology Firm Lands Two Big Deals For Cancer-Fighting Drug.
• SpyBiotech Raises $32.5M For Its Vaccine Technology.

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• Air Pollution Led To Tens Of Thousands Of Fatalities In World's Five Most Populous Cities In 2020, Researchers Say.

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• Biden Visiting Swing States To Push COVID Relief Plan.
• Psaki Says White House Would "Support A Study" Of Black Reparations.
• USA Today Analysis: Expected Retirements Will Give Biden Chances To Put Black Women On Federal Bench.
• Milley And Esper Held Back Promotion Recommendations For Female Generals Until Trump Left Office.
• Biden Using Twitter For "Policy, Not Personal Insults."
• Senators Call On DeJoy To Address "Unacceptable Delays" In Mail Delivery.
• Millions Remain Without Power As Another Major Winter Storm Looms.

- Media Analyses: Trump-McConnell Feud Could Hurt GOP Prospects In 2022.
- Barabak: Changing Times, "Talk Of Mental Decline" Drive Calls For Feinstein To Resign.
- Democrat Lasry Enters Wisconsin Senate Race.
- Limbaugh Dies At 70.

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Leading the News

Biden Administration Sets New Goals For School Reopening, Providing Broad Access To COVID-19 Vaccines.

The Washington Post (2/17, Wootson, Meckler, 10.52M) reports as the US "approaches the one-year mark of the pandemic's isolation and restrictions, the Biden administration is struggling to give precise, consistent answers to two key questions: When will the pandemic truly be behind us," and when can schools safely reopen? President Biden "has blamed miscommunication for some of the inconsistency" about when the country can return to normal, "but his administration – which has promised to use science and data as the basis for pivotal decisions – is also grappling with the fact that science and data don't produce answers as tidy or linear as campaign promises." The article discusses comments by NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci and CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky.

The AP (2/17, Jaffe) reports "Biden is in a political firestorm over how and when to get more schools open amid the coronavirus pandemic, with Republicans seizing on confusion surrounding Biden's goal to reopen a majority of schools within his first 100 days to paint the president as beholden to teachers' unions at the expense of American families." The "administration in recent weeks has sent muddled and at times contradictory messages about Biden's goal." The President's "aides dismiss the controversy as a flareup that will disappear once the coronavirus is better under control and more school districts reopen," yet "there could be lingering damage if Biden is seen to break an early promise on an issue so important to so many Americans."

NBC Nightly News (2/17, story 5, 1:25, Holt, 6.24M) reported that "vaccine shortages have factored into a new timeline by President Biden for when all Americans can get the shot. He's also offering a new goal for reopening schools." President Biden was shown saying, "By the end of July, we'll have over 600 million doses, enough to vaccinate every single American." Asked when schools will be open five days a week, Biden responded, "I think we'll be close to that by the end of the first 100 days."

CNN (2/17, Klein, Sullivan, 89.21M) reports, "The White House has continued to clarify its position on when and how schools should safely reopen, an issue that has become a national flashpoint since the coronavirus pandemic forced many classes online." Administration officials indicated that "while they do not believe teachers need to be vaccinated in order to reopen schools, they think teachers should be prioritized for vaccinations like frontline workers." For instance, Fauci said, "Even though we don't feel that every teacher needs to be vaccinated before you can open a school, that doesn't take away from the fact that we strongly support the vaccination of teachers."

Fox News (2/17, Singman, 23.99M) reports on Wednesday, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the Biden Administration "believes vaccines for teachers are not a prerequisite to reopening schools – but instead, a recommended 'mitigation step.'" Her "comments come after Vice President Kamala Harris was asked during an interview on NBC's 'Today' whether the White House believed it was safe for teachers to return to the classroom without a vaccine for the novel coronavirus."

Among other news outlets covering the story are the CBS Evening News (2/17, story 4, 1:40, O'Donnell, 4.82M), ABC World News Tonight (2/17, story 4, 2:50, Muir, 7.78M), The Hill (2/17, Chalfant, 5.69M), the New York Post (2/17, Bowden, 7.45M), and National Review (2/17, McArdle, 798K).

Biden Administration Will Spend $1.6B To Expand COVID-19 Testing.

NBC News (2/17, 4.91M) reports, "The Biden administration said it will spend $1.6 billion to expand Covid-19 testing in schools and underserved areas, increase testing supply production and expand genomic sequencing, a move administration officials described as a "bridge" until Congress approves more funding." According to NBC News, "The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will spend an additional $200 million to identify and track new strains of the virus, increasing the sequencing capacity by threefold."

CNBC (2/17, Feuer, 7.34M) reports, "The Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense will invest $650 million to expand testing in K-8 schools and 'underserved congregate settings, such as homeless shelters,' the White House said." In a statement, HHS Acting Secretary Norris Cochran said, "As part of the President's national strategy to combat COVID-19, we will deploy every available resource to ensure that more individuals and families have access to testing options during this unprecedented time and that our nation is prepared to contain and prevent the spread of possible variants."

Roll Call (2/17, Cohen, 130K) reports, "National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony Fauci said it would be impractical to require all teachers to get vaccinated before returning to in-person learning but encouraged states to make teachers a vaccination group priority." The CDC's "school reopening plan does not require that all teachers be vaccinated."

NPR (2/17, Wamsley, 3.69M) reports Jeffrey Zients, the White House COVID-19 response coordinator, "acknowledged that Johnson & Johnson will not have much vaccine available to distribute right away — assuming the company gets FDA authorization in the next few weeks."

Also reporting are Bloomberg (2/17, Wingrove, Edney, 3.57M), The Hill (2/17, Sullivan, 5.69M), Politico (2/17, Lim, 6.73M), the New York Post (2/17, Jacobs, 7.45M), and the Washington Times (2/17, 626K).

Biden Administration Pledges Almost $200M To Ramp Up Tracking Of Coronavirus Variants.

The New York Times (2/17, Zimmer, Weiland, 20.6M) reports "the Biden administration announced on Wednesday a new effort to ramp up" the US' "efforts to track coronavirus variants" by "pledging nearly $200 million to better identify the emerging threats." Describing it as "a 'down payment,' the White House said that the investment would result in a significant increase in the number of positive virus samples that labs could sequence." CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said, "When we will get to 25,000 [genomes a week] depends on the resources that we have at our fingertips and how quickly we can mobilize our partners." Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center evolutionary biologist Trevor Bedford "said there had been 'substantial gains' in national sequencing efforts since December."

Bloomberg (2/17, Shah, 3.57M) reports "three worrisome Covid-19 variants are now circulating in the U.S. and the federal government needs significance resources to track their progress, according to" Walensky. The variants "emerged initially in the U.K., South Africa and Brazil," and "have all now been seen in the U.S., said...Walensky." One priority for combatting "the variants in the U.S. is to put strong public health surveillance in place that can track changes in the virus, according to Walensky."

US Life Expectancy Dropped By One Year In First Half Of 2020.

The New York Times (2/18, Tavernise, Goodnough, 20.6M) reports "life expectancy in the United States fell by a full year in the first six months of 2020, the federal government reported on Thursday, the largest drop since World War II and a grim measure of the deadly consequences of the coronavirus pandemic." The new data give "the first full picture of the pandemic's effect on American life spans, which dropped to 77.8 years from 78.8 years in 2019." The data "also showed a deepening of racial and ethnic disparities: Life expectancy of the Black population declined by 2.7 years in the first half of 2020, slicing away 20 years of gains."

The Washington Post (2/17, A1, Bernstein, 10.52M) reports "Americans can now expect to live as long as they did in 2006, according to the provisional data released by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), a part of the" CDC. Latinos lost 1.9 years of life expectancy, and white Americans lost 0.8 years, the data show.

Bloomberg (2/18, Tanzi, 3.57M) says the report showed the gap in life expectancy "between the sexes rose to 5.4 years, the most in more than two decades."

USA Today (2/18, Rodriguez, 12.7M) reports "health experts fear U.S. life expectancy in 2020 as a whole will be worse than the half-year numbers because they do not account for the fall and winter surges that led to record COVID-19 deaths."

The Wall Street Journal (2/18, Adamy, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that in December, CDC National Center for Health Statistics mortality-statistics branch chief Robert

Anderson predicted life expectancy may drop two or three years when data on the entire year of 2020 are released.

The AP (2/17, Marchione) reports Anderson said, "This is a huge decline. ... You have to go back to World War II, the 1940s, to find a decline like this." The "report did not analyze trends for Asian or Native Americans."

NPR (2/18, Wamsley, 3.69M) reports that "for males, the life expectancy at birth was 75.1 – a decline of 1.2 years from 2019. For females, life expectancy declined to 80.5 years, a 0.9 year decrease from 2019."

PBS NewsHour (2/18, Santhanam, 792K) reports "these latest figures offer a staggering glimpse at the cost of the first surge of the COVID-19 pandemic, said Elizabeth Arias, a demographer with the National Center for Health Statistics who served as the report's lead author." Arias said, "This one-year decline in the total population is quite large."

The New York Times (2/18, Tavernise, Goodnough, 20.6M) and Axios (2/18, Fernandez, 1.26M) also report on the story.

The Secretary in the News

Senate Finance Panel To Hold Confirmation Hearing For HHS Secretary Nominee On February 24.

Inside Health Policy (2/17, Mills-Gregg, Subscription Publication) reports "the Senate Finance Committee will hold a confirmation hearing for HHS Secretary nominee Xavier Becerra on Feb. 24, the day after the Senate health committee considers his nomination." Senate Finance Chair Ron Wyden (D-OR) said in a statement, "I'm more confident than ever that [California] Attorney General Becerra is the right person to lead the way in the fight against COVID-19 and continue the essential work of ensuring all Americans can get quality, affordable health care."

Editorial: Becerra Is Troubling Choice For HHS Secretary.

An editorial in the Los Angeles Daily News (2/17, 256K) says, "The nomination of California Attorney General Xavier Becerra to serve as the U.S. Health and Human Services secretary is President Joe Biden's most controversial cabinet choice to date." The editorial adds, "Becerra is a troubling choice, especially given HHS's importance during a pandemic."

Coronavirus

Other Coronavirus News

Harris Says Teachers Should Be Given Priority For COVID-19 Vaccines.

NBC News (2/17, Shabad, 4.91M) reports on Wednesday, Vice President Kamala Harris said "teachers should be given priority for getting Covid-19 vaccinations, but wouldn't say if she believed that giving them the shots should be a prerequisite for reopening schools." During "her first live one-on-one network interview since taking office, Harris was asked by 'TODAY' show anchor Savannah Guthrie whether she could reassure teachers that it would be safe for them to go back to school even if they're not vaccinated." Harris stated, "Teachers should be a priority."

Fox News (2/17, Singman, 23.99M) reports Harris also said, "Teachers are critical to our children's development, they should be able to teach in a safe place and expand the minds and the opportunities of our children, so, teachers should be a priority along with other front-line workers. ... We're going to make them a priority." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Among other news outlets covering the story are NBC Nightly News (2/17, story 6, 3:05, Holt, 6.24M), The Hill (2/17, Jenkins, 5.69M), Newsweek (2/17, Cole, 2.67M), the New York Post (2/17, Jacobs, 7.45M), the Washington Times (2/17, Richardson, 626K), the Washington Examiner (2/17, Lim, 888K), and the Daily Caller (2/17, Olohan, 375K).

US Administering An Average Of 1.7M Vaccine Doses Per Day.

The AP (2/17) reports that the US is "vaccinating on average 1.7 million Americans per day for the coronavirus, up from under 1 million a month ago." Much of the increase, according to CDC data, "comes from people receiving their second dose of the approved vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer," and "the pace of first dose vaccinations has been largely steady over the past several weeks, hovering around an average of 900,000 shots per day."

The New York Times (2/17, Leonhardt, 20.6M) reports, "An appropriate goal, experts say, is three million shots per day – probably by April. At that pace, half of adults would receive their first shot by April and all adults who wanted a shot could receive one by June, saving thousands of lives and allowing normal life to return by midsummer."

CNN Anchor Presses White House Aide About Biden Administration's Stance On Vaccinating Teachers.

The Hill (2/17, Mastrangelo, 5.69M) reports on Wednesday, CNN anchor John Berman "pressed a top White House aide to clarify the Biden administration's stance on teacher vaccines amid the discussion on how to safely reopen schools during the coronavirus pandemic." He told Symone Sanders, chief spokesperson for Vice President Kamala Harris, "It's not a trick question. I feel like you guys have treated it like a trick question. ... I just want to know what the White House position is on whether teachers need to be vaccinated in order for kids to return safely return to school." The article mentions CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky and NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Fauci Discusses Timeline For General Access To COVID-19 Vaccines, Says Vaccinating All Teachers Before Reopening Schools Is "Non-Workable."

On CBS This Morning (2/17, 2.47M), NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, the White House's chief medical adviser, discussed when COVID-19 vaccines might be available to the general public. He said, "We were hoping that it would be the end of April, but what has happened is that the doses that we were expecting earlier from J&J likely will not be available for another couple of months after that. The ultimate total amount of doses that J&J will get us, we're pretty confident that we're going to get the 100 million doses by the end of June, the beginning of July. And I believe that's the reason why when President was saying available by July, it was in tune with the fact

that we will get those doses that we were promised. And I'm sure we'll get them by that time. So I think the dates now coincide pretty well."

Politico (2/17, Leonard, 6.73M) reports Fauci also told CBS that "vaccinating all teachers against Covid-19 before reopening schools is 'non-workable,' wading into an issue that has taken center stage for the Biden administration amid the ongoing pandemic." Fauci stated, "If you are going to say that every single teacher needs to be vaccinated before you get back to school, I believe quite frankly that's a non-workable situation." The article says his "assessment on Wednesday of vaccination plans for teachers laid down a marker that others in the Biden administration have thus far been unwilling to match amid a heated debate over reopening schools."

The Hill (2/17, Axelrod, 5.69M) reports, however, that Fauci added, "I think teachers should absolutely be priority among those who we consider essential personnel, and you should try and get as many teachers as you possibly can vaccinated as quickly as you possibly can."

The Daily Caller (2/17, Safi, 375K) also covers the story.

Fauci Says Studies Suggest COVID-19 Vaccines May Slow The Spread Of Coronavirus.

NBC News (2/17, Miller, 4.91M) reports, "A growing body of evidence suggests that the Covid-19 vaccine can slow the spread of the coronavirus, Dr. Anthony Fauci said Wednesday." He said during a White House briefing that it remains a "looming question" whether someone infected with coronavirus can transmit it to someone else. "'There have been some studies that are pointing in a very favorable direction,' he said, adding that these studies will have to be corroborated by additional research."

The Washington Times (2/17, 626K) also covers the story.

CDC Director Says US Needs To Reduce Spread Of SARS-CoV-2 To Curb Spread Of Variants.

CNN (2/17, Gumbrecht, 89.21M) reports CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said the US needs to reduce the spread of SARS-CoV-2 in order to curb the spread of more dangerous variants. Dr. Walensky said, "I know these variants are concerning, especially as we're seeing signs of progress. I'm talking about them today because I am concerned, too." A study published in the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report "detailed cases of the B.1.1.7 variant – first identified in the United Kingdom – among eight Minnesota residents."

CNBC (2/17, Higgins-Dunn, 7.34M) reports Dr. Walensky co-authored a perspective piece published in JAMA with White House Chief Medical Advisor and NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, as well as Dr. Henry Walke, the CDC's Covid incident manager, expressing their concerns about the variants. The three co-authors wrote that the B.1.1.7 variant is highly infectious and "preliminary data suggest the possibility of increased severity of disease with infection."

Poll Indicates 55% Of Americans Say Teachers Should Be Vaccinated Before Schools Reopen.

Forbes (2/17, McEvoy, 10.33M) reports even as "the Biden administration is pushing to get students back in the classroom without a coronavirus vaccination requirement for teachers, most Americans believe schools should wait until all teachers are inoculated before they reopen," according to a Morning Consult/Politico poll released on Wednesday. Data show more than "half (55%) of the roughly 2,000 voters surveyed...said states should wait to reopen schools until teachers are vaccinated, while 34% said schools should open as quickly as possible regardless of teacher vaccinations."

Morning Consult (2/17, Yokley, 3K) also covers the story.

COVID-19 Vaccine Shortage Compels US Diplomats To Seek Doses From Foreign Governments.

The Washington Post (2/17, Hudson, 10.52M) reports, "U.S. diplomats serving in countries with poor medical infrastructure and high coronavirus infection rates are venting frustrations about the way top officials in Washington are distributing the vaccines for the virus, according to meeting notes, interviews and documents obtained by The Washington Post." The shortage of COVID-19 "vaccines has forced State Department leaders to make difficult and unenviable decisions, and created humbling experiences for U.S. diplomats representing the world's wealthiest country." Some "13 foreign governments offered to inoculate U.S. officials serving abroad with their own supplies of U.S.-made Moderna and Pfizer vaccines – a gesture the State Department has already accepted, said senior U.S. officials."

Fauci Urges Americans To Get COVID-19 Vaccine When They Become Eligible.

Fox News (2/17, Singman, 23.99M) reports that on Wednesday, NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci sent "a message to Americans – urging them to 'get vaccinated' against the novel coronavirus when they become eligible." Fauci said, "When your turn to get vaccinated comes up, get vaccinated." He added, "It is not only good for you, and good for your family and your community. ... It will have a very important impact on the dynamics of the outbreak in our country."

Poll Finds 73% Of Americans Believe COVID-19 Vaccine Will Be Widely Available By Summer's End.

The Hill (2/17, Coleman, 5.69M) reports nearly "three-quarters of Americans said they are confident the COVID-19 vaccine will be widely available in their state by the end of the summer, according to a" Quinnipiac University poll released on Wednesday. Data show 73% "of respondents said they are very confident or somewhat confident that their state's residents will be able to get the vaccine before the end of the summer." Some 25% "of participants said they have little or no confidence that will happen."

Prominent Scientists Want Biden Administration To Increase Worker Protections Against COVID-19.

Bloomberg Law (2/17, Hussein, Subscription Publication, 4K) reports NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "and two other Biden administration officials have been urged by 13 doctors and scientists

from across the U.S. to take immediate action to curb the aerosolized spread of the coronavirus before variant strains of the contagion spread widely, wiping out recent progress to curb the pandemic."

CNBC (2/17, Feuer, 7.34M) reports these "scientists are pushing the Biden administration to require N95 air filtration masks for employees in risky workplaces like meat packing plants and prisons." They "called on the administration to acknowledge that the virus is more airborne than previously thought, especially with the rise of more contagious variants. The highly effective masks filter out about 95% of all small particles."

Kaiser Health News (2/17, Jewett) reports this group of scientists says "even though the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has acknowledged the virus can spread through tiny airborne particles, it needs to take 'strong immediate' action to update its guidance to reduce the risk." Some of these safety measures "include broader use of N95 masks in workplaces as well as better ventilation."

Harris Given Two Pinocchios By WPost Fact-Checker Over "Starting From Scratch" Comment.

Fox News (2/17, Wulfsohn, 23.99M) reports, "Washington Post fact-checker Glenn Kessler challenged Vice President Kamala Harris' recent claim that the Biden administration was 'starting from scratch' with its coronavirus vaccine rollout." He "concluded that while Harris' claim that 'no national strategy or plan' can fall under a 'philosophical difference' between the Trump administration's state-level approach versus the federal oversight by the Biden administration, the vice president 'gets into trouble' with the 'starting from scratch' remark." Kessler wrote that Biden Administration officials "have built on an existing structure left behind by the Trump team. ... Harris modified her comment by saying 'in many ways,' but that's not quite enough to avoid Pinocchios. She earns Two." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

CNN, WPost Fact-Checkers Accused Of Explaining Away Biden's Claim That There Were No COVID-19 Vaccines When He Took Office.

Fox News (2/17, Rutz, 23.99M) reports, "Fact-checkers at CNN and The Washington Post were quick to explain and contextualize President Biden's statement Tuesday night that there was no coronavirus vaccine when he took office." The article says the "Post's Glenn Kessler and CNN's Daniel Dale, who vigorously fact-checked former President Donald Trump, wrote Biden had simply gaffed, since he mentioned earlier in the same town hall there had been 'only' 50 million vaccine doses when he took office." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Biden Adviser Lacks Explanation About Why California, Florida Have Similar COVID-19 Data Despite Vastly Different Policies.

On MSNBC Live (2/17, 1.26M), White House senior adviser for COVID response, Andy Slavitt, discussed why some states which did not implement lockdowns have COVID-19 data which are similar to those of other states which did. Slavitt said, "Look, there's so much of this virus that we think we understand, that we think we can predict, it's just a little beyond our explanation. What

we do know is the more careful people are, the more they mask and social distance, the quicker we vaccinate, the quicker it goes away and the less it spreads. But we have to get better visibility into variants and what role they play, et cetera. But as we learned, this is a virus that continues to surprise us. It's very hard to predict. All around the country we have to continue to do a better job. I think we are but we're not done yet."

Fox News (2/17, Betz, 23.99M) reports "Slavitt appeared stumped Wednesday when asked on MSNBC to explain California and Florida's similar COVID-19 trends, despite having wildly different responses to the pandemic." In spite of "their differences in policies," the states have "shown similar COVID-19 trends – even accounting for the population difference."

The Washington Examiner (2/17, Lee, 888K) and the Daily Caller (2/17, Morefield, 375K) also cover the story.

White House Adviser Addresses Concerns About The Efficacy Of Vaccines Against Coronavirus Variants.

On CNBC (2/17, 283K), White House senior adviser for COVID response, Andy Slavitt, discussed concerns about coronavirus variants, saying, "Look, there is no question that there are variants that are coming that are making their way here into the US, and some a little bit more quickly than others. I think the news on the vaccine front on the variants has been I would say measured positive." Slavitt said "we've got a high degree of confidence that both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines work well" against B.1.1.7, "the UK strain that is here in more abundance." Both companies "are working on a plan to continually update the vaccines should there be mutations that they don't perform well on." He added that even though the vaccines are less effective against the South African variant, they still work above the threshold necessary to create antibodies, which he concluded "is a pretty good sign to me."

CNBC (2/17, Miao, 7.34M) reports during the interview, Slavitt indicated "governors have 'difficult decisions' to make in juggling vaccine distribution for groups including seniors, nursing home workers and teachers." He stated, "We try to support them with the science the best we can, but until the shortage is resolved we're going to still have these challenges."

White House Press Secretary Accused Of "Doubling Down" On Harris' Remarks About COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution.

The New York Post (2/17, Bowden, 7.45M) reports that on Wednesday, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki "doubled-down on Vice President Kamala Harris' disputed claim that the new administration was 'starting from scratch' to develop a national vaccine distribution plan." She said, "I don't think most governors or most of the American people would tell you that they think it was handled effectively and efficiently by the prior administration, given we are where we are." The article mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

GOP Campaign Arm Targeting Dems Over School Reopenings In New Ad.

The Hill (2/17, Axelrod, 5.69M) reports, "The Senate Republican campaign arm is going after Democrats in new ads hitting them over school reopenings amid the coronavirus pandemic." This

"new 15-second digital spot from the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) is targeting Democratic Sens. Raphael Warnock (Ga.), Mark Kelly (Ariz.), Catherine Cortez Masto (N.M.), Michael Bennet (Colo.), Tammy Duckworth (Ill.) and Maggie Hassan (N.H.), all of whom are up for reelection next year." The spot "highlights questions over the White House's plans to reopen schools, a topic where the GOP believes it can go on the offensive."

Technology, Health Experts Urge Feds To Build Working IT Systems To Handle COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution, Share Data.

FedScoop (2/17, Nyczepir) reports the US "government must build working IT systems to manage COVID-19 vaccines and share real-time data on supply and immunizations, say technology and health experts." States and localities with limited resources "didn't receive the tech they needed from the Trump administration to support vaccine rollout, according to current and former federal and state officials. States expected the federal government to provide at least one functional system for distribution, scheduling and reporting they could use." Still, "the officials say there's still time to develop such a system given the uneven vaccine rollout nationwide."

Some 130 Cancer Centers, Organizations Ask Biden To Make COVID-19 Vaccines For People With Cancer A Priority.

Contributor Victoria Forster writes in Forbes (2/17, 10.33M) that on Wednesday, "a group of 130 cancer centers and organizations, spearheaded by the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR), sent a letter to President Biden and senior members of the CDC asking them to prioritize Covid-19 vaccinations for people with cancer and cancer survivors." Growing evidence indicates "people undergoing cancer therapy are at a higher risk of severe illness and dying of Covid-19 should they contract the coronavirus." Furthermore, "people who have survived certain types of cancer such as blood cancer are also at higher risk from Covid-19, even if they have finished their treatments." The Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, Massachusetts is one of the signatories.

Commentary Warns Pandemic Will Worsen Unless US Continues To Slow The Spread Of Coronavirus.

In a New York Times (2/17, 20.6M) op-ed, Ezekiel J. Emanuel, Rick Bright and Céline Gounder, who were members of President Biden's advisory board on COVID during the transition, write that despite some recent improvements, the "Covid-19 omens are not good." They warn that "this feel-good moment is obscuring what could be a dismal spring and the potential of further lockdowns unless we can continue to slow the spread of this virus."

USAToday: Biden's Failure To Reopen Schools Shows He Has Yet To Learn Lessons About Not Following The Science.

USA Today (2/17, 12.7M) writes in an editorial that the last "year has inflicted devastating lessons on what happens when elected leaders fail to follow the science in making decisions that affect the public's well-being." Nevertheless, "the ongoing debate about whether to reopen the nation's public schools shows those lessons still haven't been adequately learned. The scientific evidence

for safely reopening schools during the COVID-19 pandemic has been clear for months." The paper adds that "President Joe Biden last week backed off from his pledge to reopen most schools during his first 100 days in office. Instead, the White House set a goal of having at least 50% of schools open at least one day a week for in-person instruction."

Commentary Says Biden Is Taking Action To Ensure The Safe Reopening Of Schools.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Education for K-12 Jessica Cardichon writes in USA Today (2/17, 12.7M) that during "the first three weeks of his presidency, President Joe Biden has taken immediate action to address this crisis with a clear goal in mind: Get students back to school, in-person learning five days a week as quickly and safely as possible. This is no easy feat, but an evidence-based, urgent approach like the one we are charting can make all the difference."

Commentary Criticizes Biden About COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution, School Reopenings.

Contributor Michael Barone writes in the Washington Examiner (2/17, 888K), "You expect a certain number of stumbles from a new administration. The incoming Biden team professed dismay at its predecessor's "nonexistent" coronavirus vaccine distribution program, and this week President Biden complained of the vaccine, 'which we didn't have when I came into office.'" Biden vowed "to deliver 1 million a week," however, "there were 1.5 million vaccinations on Inauguration Day, and Biden had received two doses of vaccine – on Dec. 21 and Jan. 11. It's easier to achieve your goal if you don't set the goalposts past a mark already reached." Barone wonder if "something similar [will] work on reopening schools," or if Biden's stance will turn suburban parents against him.

Columnist Says Pandemic Is Allowing Biden To Advance A Broader Economic Agenda.

Doyle McManus writes in his Los Angeles Times (2/17, 3.37M) column that "when Joe Biden launched his campaign for the presidency in 2019, his economic proposals were relatively modest updates of the middle-class-oriented agenda he championed as vice president under Barack Obama." However, at present, "Biden's economic message, retooled to address current needs, has real urgency." McManus says the President "isn't stopping at pandemic relief. He's also using the emergency to build support for the far broader program of economic reform he adopted midway through his campaign last year, including massive investments in manufacturing, technology, education and child care."

NIAID Begins Enrollment For Phase 2/3 Testing Of Four COVID-19 Therapeutics In ACTIV-2 Trial.

Homeland Preparedness News (2/17, Galford) reports, "Another four COVID-19 therapeutics for those with mild to moderate symptoms moved further up the pipeline this week, with the announcement of enrollment for Phase 2/3 testing in the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) ACTIV-2 trial." According to the article, "ACTIV-2 will involve randomized, placebo-controlled studies of Synairgen's SNG001 inhalable beta interferon, a

monoclonal antibody combination from AstraZeneca known as AZD7442 and Camostat mesilate, an oral serine protease inhibitor created by Sagent Pharmaceuticals."

California's COVID-19 Cases Fall To Pre-Thanksgiving Levels.

The Los Angeles Times (2/17, Money, Lin, 3.37M) reports coronavirus infections in California have fallen to pre-Thanksgiving levels, "bringing renewed optimism that a wider reopening of the still-shackled economy may be just around the corner." In the last week, "California has reported an average of 8,087 new coronavirus cases per day – a level not seen since mid-November, according to data compiled by The Times. That rolling average is down 53% from two weeks ago." Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) "hinted that more counties may emerge next week from what the state calls the purple tier – the strictest of California's four-rung reopening roadmap for businesses and other public spaces." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci is quoted as saying, "I do not believe that we should accept the inevitability of there being another surge."

North Dakota Detects First Two Cases Of UK Coronavirus Variant In State.

The AP (2/17) reports health "officials said Wednesday that the variant strain of the coronavirus first detected in the United Kingdom has now been confirmed in North Dakota." Health authorities "said one person had recently returned from domestic travel before getting sick and the second person was a close contact of the first." Authorities "said one other case is suspected to be the UK variant and is currently under investigation."

The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead (ND) (2/17, Griffith, 49K) reports the infections are "the state's first two cases" of the UK variant. However, "the two people are no longer infected."

"Bristol Variant" Of Coronavirus Identified In US For First Time.

The New York Post (2/17, Jacobs, 7.45M) reports "a new mutation of the highly contagious UK coronavirus variant has been found in the US, the feds revealed Wednesday." CDC Director "Rochelle Walensky said at a White House briefing that the first case of the B117 variant with the E484K mutation – known as the 'Bristol variant' – has been identified." She "declined to specify where the US case had been detected, or the status of the patient."

South African Coronavirus Variant Detected In Massachusetts.

Fox News (2/17, Hein, 23.99M) reports "a case of the South African coronavirus variant was confirmed in a Massachusetts resident who has no reported travel history." On Tuesday, "officials said...the patient is a female in her 20s from Middlesex County, but did not reveal her current health status." One "news release said the variant was detected through genetic sequencing completed at the Broad Institute on behalf of the Department of Public Health, and that it was the first case of the B.1.351 variant detected in the state." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci "has previously said the variants should serve as a 'wakeup call' for vaccine developers and those involved in the research to remain 'nimble' so that adjustments may be made when necessary."

Michigan Prison Has Detected 90 Cases Of UK Coronavirus Variant.

The AP (2/17) reports 90 "cases of a COVID-19 variant believed to be more contagious have been found in inmates and staff at a western Michigan prison, and dozens of test results are pending, officials said." Daily COVID-19 "testing began at the Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility, in Ionia, after a prison employee was found to have the B.1.1.7 variant, which first emerged in the United Kingdom, officials said." Testing was conducted for 95 people, and "90 individuals – 88 of them inmates – had the variant, with the two other cases among prison employees, Michigan State Police announced Tuesday."

Health Authorities Investigating Potential Case Of South African Coronavirus Variant In Reno, Nevada.

The Reno (NV) Gazette-Journal (2/17, Hidalgo, Wilkins, 219K) reports "health officials are investigating a potential case of the COVID-19 South African variant in Reno," Nevada. The investigation was revealed "by Washoe County Health District Officer Kevin Dick on Wednesday." If the potential case is "confirmed, it would be the first case of the B1.351 variant in Nevada." The South African variant was "found to be even more resistant to the current group of vaccines than the U.K. variant, according to" NIAID Director Anthony Fauci.

Wake County, North Carolina Cancels Drive-Through Vaccination Clinic Due To Ice Storm.

The Raleigh (NC) News & Observer (2/17, Sessoms, 396K) reports Wake County, North Carolina "has canceled the drive-through vaccination clinic scheduled for Thursday at PNC Arena because of the approaching ice storm and the risk of hazardous driving conditions." Wake County officials "announced that all appointments scheduled for Thursday will be moved to Monday, Feb. 22, at the arena."

New York Has Confirmed 82 Cases Of UK Coronavirus Variant, Governor Says.

The New York Post (2/17, Hogan, Musumeci, 7.45M) reports "there are now 82 confirmed cases of the highly contagious UK variant of COVID-19 in New York, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Wednesday." That number "is up by 12 since Saturday, Cuomo said on a conference call with reporters as he noted that 11 of those new cases were in New York City, while one was in Broome County."

Expert: Reducing COVID-19 Cases Makes Vaccines More Likely To Stay Effective Against Mutations.

CNN (2/17, Maxouris, 89.21M) reports "lowering Covid-19 cases across the US isn't only critical to helping prevent another surge fueled by variants – it also makes vaccines more likely to continue working effectively against mutations, one expert says." Dr. Michael Mina, an epidemiologist and immunologist at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, said on Tuesday, "The best thing we could possibly do to improve the chances that the vaccine will continue working...is to reduce cases as much as possible without having those reductions occur as a result of vaccine-derived immunity." Mina added, "The more opportunities we give the virus to come in contact with somebody who is immune, the more opportunities there are for the virus to find a way around that

level of immunity and those antibodies." The NIH and NIAID Director Anthony Fauci are mentioned.

Maryland Officials Detect Brazilian Coronavirus Variant For First Time.

The Baltimore Sun (2/17, Oxenden, 629K) reports Gov. Larry Hogan (R) "said Wednesday night that Maryland health officials have detected a new variant of the coronavirus in the state." The variant, called "P.1, is more commonly known as the Brazil variant, and first appeared in the United States at the end of January." The state's health department "confirmed the new variant with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in an adult older than 65 from the National Capital Region." The person "recently died after international travel."

CDC Report: LGBTQ People Have Higher Rates Of Underlying Health Issues That Lead To Greater COVID-19 Risks.

The Washington Post (2/17, Schmidt, 10.52M) reports that a "report the CDC released this month found that gay, lesbian and bisexual people in the United States have higher rates of self-reported underlying conditions associated with severe covid-19 outcomes, including asthma, cancer, heart disease, obesity, kidney disease and stroke, than heterosexual people." Within this community, "Black and Hispanic people are particularly vulnerable, according to the report, which relied on 2017-2019 data from a collection of population health surveys called the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System." But "as the report's authors point out, no one knows the true toll of the virus on that community – because the United States is not collecting the data necessary to study it."

Colorado Reports Fewest COVID-19 Outbreaks Since Mid-November.

The Denver Post (2/17, Wingerter, 660K) reports "Colorado had the fewest reported outbreaks of COVID-19 over the last week since mid-November, with long-term care facilities accounting for much of the decrease." The state's "Department of Public Health and Environment reported 829 COVID-19 outbreaks as of Wednesday, which was 66 fewer than the week before." However, "the number of outbreaks in schools increased by 10, to 132."

Expert Concerned About New Coronavirus Variants.

ABC World News Tonight (2/17, story 6, 1:40, Muir, 7.78M) reported the CDC is "warning again...about the more contagious [COVID-19] variants here in the US, [saying] that they could easily cause a rapid rise in cases and many believe that the UK variant still could become the main variant in the coming weeks here in the US." Brown University School of Public Health Dean Ashish Jha said, "I'm pretty concerned about these variants. I do expect they will become dominant by the latter half of March. They are more contagious and what we're all worried about is they're going to cause a big spike in cases." The broadcast added that NIAID Director Anthony Fauci showed vaccines can help reduce transmission of the coronavirus.

Trump Says Biden Was "Either Not Telling The Truth Or Mentally Gone" Following COVID-19 Vaccine Claim.

The Daily Caller (2/17, Kruta, 375K) reports "former President Donald Trump lashed out at President Joe Biden during a Wednesday interview on Newsmax." The former president "argued that Biden was 'either not telling the truth or mentally gone' after the president appeared to claim during a CNN town hall that the coronavirus vaccine was not available before he took office in January." Trump said on Newsmax, "Well I saw that he said that there was no vaccine when he came into office. ... So he was either not telling the truth or he's mentally gone, one or the other and he's getting – actually Joe Biden is being killed on that whole thing, because even the haters said, 'Well wait a minute, you know this vaccine was announced long before,' and I believe he got the shot sometime before January twentieth." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci is mentioned.

Slaoui: Biden Administration Inherited COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution System From Trump Administration.

Fox Business (2/17, Stabile, 3.06M) reports "the Biden administration has not hesitated to take credit for coronavirus vaccine distribution in the U.S., but former Operation Warp Speed chief adviser Dr. Moncef Slaoui said Wednesday it's obvious the White House has inherited the same system from its predecessor." Slaoui said on FOX Business Network, "The plans are exactly as we put them together, to have about 200 million doses of vaccine distributed by the end of the month of March, and that's remaining the plan." Slaoui added, "What happened is, we have integrated under the operation [of] the NIH, the FDA...the CDC...the Army and private companies. ... [We], frankly, shielded ourselves from the politics, focusing on the science and generating data."

Americans Could Soon Have Ability To Choose Between Two Labeled Levels Of Mask Protection.

CNN (2/17, Enriquez, 89.21M) reports "Americans may soon be able to choose between two clearly labeled levels of face mask protection while browsing store shelves." The novel "national mask standard outlines minimum fit, design, performance and testing requirements for face masks and would require user instructions, package labeling and a permanent tag on the product." ASTM International, which is an international standards organization, "spent seven months conducting expedited testing and review and published its guidance on Tuesday." How quickly Americans "will see ASTM-labeled masks on store shelves may come down to how the standards are adopted by government agencies, such as the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and" the Occupational Health and Safety Administration.

Biden Says COVID-19 Vaccines Will Be Available To All US Residents By July.

The Intelligencer (2/17, Rosa-Acquino, 1.3M) reports "President Biden on Tuesday participated in his first televised town hall since taking office to give what can be classified as an educated guess: [COVID-19] vaccines will be available for every American by late July." That is "a change from Biden's pledge just last month, when he said everyone who wants a vaccine will be able to get one

by the spring." On Tuesday, Biden "laid much of the blame for needing to push back that timeline at the feet of the Trump administration: 'Think of what we didn't do' from the time the coronavirus arrived in the United States. 'We wasted so much time.'"

Biden's Visit To Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine Plant In Michigan Postponed By One Day.

MLive (MI) (2/17, Tunison, 828K) reports President "Biden's trip to tour Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine manufacturing plant in Portage," Michigan "has been postponed a day." Late Wednesday, "Portage City Manager Joseph La Margo confirmed...that city officials were informed the visit planned for Thursday, Feb. 18 has been rescheduled for Friday." Weather was a factor "in the decision, officials said."

Fauci Discusses COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout, Herd Immunity In Interview.

In an interview on CNN's Anderson Cooper 360 (2/17, 1.22M), NIAID Director Anthony Fauci discussed the COVID-19 vaccine rollout and herd immunity. Fauci said, "By July, by the end of July, there will be available" the amount of COVID-19 "vaccine to essentially vaccinate everybody in the country, because that is what you would need is about 600 million doses...for about 300 million people." Fauci also said herd immunity will "depend on how many people want to get vaccinated, and that's the reason why we're putting a big push on getting out and extending ourselves into the community, particularly the minority community, to address...vaccine hesitancy."

CNN (2/18, Cooper, 89.21M) reports Fauci "said that Americans should continue wearing their masks and social distancing even after getting the vaccine because they can still spread coronavirus."

Kessler Discusses Drop In COVID-19 Cases In US During Interview.

In an interview on MSNBC's Rachel Maddow Show (2/17, 769K), former FDA Commissioner David Kessler, who is now the chief science officer for the COVID-19 response in the Biden Administration, discussed the recent decrease in COVID-19 cases in the US. Kessler said, "I think it is too early to say that this decrease is due to a vaccine effect. We are seeing a decrease in the number of cases in long-term care facilities, and some of my colleagues are suggesting...that may be a vaccine effect, and that may be good news, but it's still too early."

Commentary: Biden Has No National Plan For Vaccinating Teachers Against COVID-19.

In an opinion piece for the Washington Examiner (2/17, 888K), commentary writer Eddie Scarry says "it's nice that [President] Biden thinks teachers should receive higher priority in getting a" COVID-19 "vaccine that's in very high demand. But why isn't he doing anything about it?" Scarry asserts that "if Biden, who says he wants schools open, were to take action, he would have two options: He could either ensure that teachers receive higher priority for vaccination, or he could find a way to force them back to school without vaccination." Scarry concludes, "He has done neither. And the reason is simple. Biden has no national plan."

Biden Administration Rejects Calls To Update Guidelines That Discourage Americans From Using N95 Respirators.

CBS News (2/17, Tin, 5.39M) reports "the Biden administration is rejecting calls to change current guidelines that discourage the public from wearing N95 respirators, the high-filtration masks currently reserved for health care workers, although some manufacturers say a growing domestic surplus has gone unused." CDC Director Rochelle Walensky "told reporters Wednesday that the agency still believed standard, well-fitting cloth masks were sufficient to curb the spread of COVID-19." Walensky said, "For reasons supported by science, comfort, costs, and practicality, the CDC does not recommend routine use of N95 respirators for protection against COVID-19 by the general public." FDA's Office of Strategic Partnerships and Technology Innovation Director Suzanne Schwartz "said the agency is still receiving reports of 'spot shortages'" of N95 masks.

Opinion: Teachers Unions, "Team Biden" Holding Back Schools From Reopening Full-Time.

In an opinion piece for the New York Post (2/17, 7.45M), contributor John Podhoretz says, "Remember the good old days, when the issue of reopening schools to full-time, in-class instruction was about COVID? It's not about helping people avoid contracting the novel coronavirus any longer." Podhoretz writes, "Now it's about saving them from...mold. And asthma. And other conditions that have nothing whatever to do with COVID and everything to do with coming up with reasons why schools should remain closed until teachers unions decide it's all right for their members to go back to doing what teachers have done since the days of ancient Athens – instruct their charges in person. Face to face." Podhoretz asserts that "Team Biden is part of the problem." He quotes CDC Director Rochelle Walensky.

Editorial: Biden Administration Making School Reopenings More Difficult.

The New York Post (2/17, 7.45M) says in an editorial, "America needs its schools reopened, but President Biden and his team are making it harder even as they pretend otherwise." The Post adds, "Biden slammed President Donald Trump during the campaign for not doing more to get schools open, but the only clear goal Joe's team has offered now is actually less than the nation already has. All it offers is empty rhetoric, dodgy answers to factual questions – and policies that delay what it says it wants."

CDC Guidelines On School Reopenings Lead To Reassurance, Confusion.

CNN (2/17, Howard, 89.21M) reports the CDC "released new guidance on Friday detailing strategies for how schools can open safely during the pandemic." Atlanta Public Schools Superintendent Lisa Herring "said that she felt reassured. The safety practices within the school district were among the CDC recommendations." The federal agency "still says its new guidelines provide strategies for schools to continue in-person learning, even in...Covid-19 transmission 'red' zones." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci said, "There can be some confusion there. What the guidelines are saying is that there are a number of things that you can mitigate to make it safer, regardless of what level you're in."

Analysis Examines Why COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Appears "Chaotic And Incomprehensible."

USA Today (2/17, Weise, 12.7M) says in an analysis, "If the COVID-19 vaccine rollout seems chaotic and incomprehensible, with numbers that don't add up and allocations that don't make sense, you're not alone. Even people who study this for a living are at a loss." USA Today poses the question, "If things appear to be on track, why is there so much chaos at the state level, with long lines, people unable to get appointments and clinics closing due to lack of vaccine?" According to the paper, "there are several reasons," and "one is a lack of federal transparency about vaccine supply and shipments and continued fluctuation of vaccine deliveries, all of which confuse and confound states."

Commentary Criticizes American Rescue Plan, Says Some Provisions Extend Beyond What Is Necessary To Alleviate Suffering.

In an opinion piece for Forbes (2/17, 10.33M), contributor Elizabeth Bauer says "the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget has now voiced strong criticism of the" American Rescue Plan. The committee said, "Only about 1 percent of the entire package goes toward COVID vaccines, and 5 percent is truly focused on public health needs surrounding the pandemic. Meanwhile, nearly half of the package will be spent on poorly targeted rebate checks and state and local government aid, including to households and governments that have experienced little or no financial loss during this crisis." Bauer criticizes the bill, saying it "is marketed as 'covid relief' when its provisions extend far beyond what's needed to directly alleviate financial suffering and implement needed remedies." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci is quoted.

WSJournal Says $1.9T COVID-19 Relief Plan Includes $22B Tax Hike Impacting Multinational Companies.

In an editorial, the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says the $1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief plan includes policy changes that are irrelevant to the pandemic, including a $22 billion tax hike impacting multinational companies.

Opinion: Risks Of Not Spending Enough On COVID-19 Relief More Damaging Than Spending Too Much.

In an opinion piece for the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), Alan Blinder, former vice chairman of the Federal Reserve, says the risks of not spending enough money on COVID-19 relief are more damaging and more likely than spending too much.

Neanderthal DNA May Be Linked To Lower Risk Of Severe COVID-19, Researchers Say.

The Hill (2/17, Choi, 5.69M) reports "researchers have discovered a possible genetic link between Neanderthal DNA and a lower risk of developing a severe case of the coronavirus." Researchers "found that a certain haplogroup, a population that shares common DNA, was roughly 22 percent less likely to develop a severe case of COVID-19." The "DNA is believed to have been inherited

from Neanderthals." The "DNA believed to protect against illness was found on the 12th chromosome, while the DNA discovered in a previous study that researchers theorized increased the chances of severe illness was found on the third chromosome." The study was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America.

Scientists Denied NIH Funding To Develop Universal Coronavirus Vaccine.

USA Today (2/17, Heath, 12.7M) reports Drew Weissman, "one of two scientists at the University of Pennsylvania behind the scientific breakthrough that enabled Moderna and Pfizer to make mRNA vaccines," and a fellow scientist have been working on a "more versatile coronavirus vaccine," but when they took a proposal for their project "to the National Institutes of Health for funding last May, they left empty-handed." The scientists "had proposed research on vaccines to protect against any variant of the virus, known as a universal or pan vaccine," but NIH staff who initially wanted to put the grant on a fast-track for approval were prevented from doing so "by negative scores from the independent scientists asked to review the grant proposal." According to Weissman, some of the reviewers "said, 'We don't need a pan coronavirus vaccine,' which is crazy."

Brazilian Laboratory Says Sinovac Vaccine Is Effective Against UK, South African Variants.

Reuters (2/17, Benassatto) reports, "The COVID-19 vaccine developed by China's Sinovac Biotech is effective against the UK and South African variants, the vaccine's Brazilian partner said on Wednesday, citing test results in Chinese trials." Dimas Covas, "head of the Butantan biomedical center in Sao Paulo which [led] domestic trials of the Chinese vaccine and is supplying doses to Brazil's Health Ministry, said: 'We have tested this vaccine in China against the English and the South African variants, with good results.'" Covas "did not give any more details on exactly how effective the vaccine proved against these strains."

Zients Says J&J Has Only A Few Million Doses Of Its Experimental COVID-19 Vaccine.

Reuters (2/17, O'Donnell, Renshaw) reports the White House's COVID-19 response coordinator, Jeffrey Zients, said Wednesday that Johnson & Johnson "has only a few million doses of its experimental COVID-19 vaccine in its inventory even as likely U.S. regulatory authorization is only a few weeks away." Zients said J&J remains "committed to providing 100 million doses by June but deliveries are likely to be 'back-end loaded' as J&J works with the U.S. government to boost supply."

The New York Times (2/17, LaFraniere, 20.6M) says though the J&J vaccine "would be the third to be authorized in the United States, the nation's vaccine stock would not immediately increase. That is disappointing news for health officials and residents across the country who were hoping that another supplier would add to the 13.5 million doses a week now being delivered to states by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna."

CNBC (2/17, Lovelace, 7.34M) also reports.

Hierarchy Of COVID-19 Vaccines Could Negatively Impact Vaccine Rollout.

STAT (2/17, Branswell, 262K) reports, "News coverage and social media posts about clinical trial results are creating a hierarchy of Covid vaccines in the minds of much of the public: 'good vaccines' and 'bad vaccines,'" a narrative that "health officials say is a problem." Some people may refuse a vaccine they see as less effective. The article says, "In truth, the phenomenon is already playing out, even among some who understand the caveats around when the studies were conducted and the operational benefits of these easier-to-deploy vaccines. STAT asked Emory University immunologist Rafi Ahmed if he would specify a preference should his mother ask for advice about Covid vaccines. Ahmed replied without hesitation: He'd tell her to get one of the messengerRNA, or mRNA, vaccines made by Pfizer or Moderna." The article mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Financial Analysts Suggest FDA Could Reject AstraZeneca's COVID-19 Vaccine For Efficacy, Manufacturing Process.

FiercePharma (2/17, Weintraub, 12K) reports SVB Leerink analysts sent a note to clients Wednesday suggesting the FDA may reject AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine, and that a point of "major concern" is "that AstraZeneca is manufacturing its vaccine on a 'distributed' basis, meaning it's not centralized, but spread over multiple sites and contract partners." Additionally, "for earlier published trials, AstraZeneca's vaccine was manufactured at different sites and tested at varying dosing schedules," and questions about the vaccine's efficacy remain as variants of the virus emerge around the world. The analysts suggested that the FDA "could very well decide not to clear a sub-par vaccine, even though the demand for vaccination is far outstripping the supply of the two mRNA vaccines on the market, from Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech."

Cuba's Sovereign 2 Vaccine Nearing Final Trials.

The New York Times (2/17, Augustin, Kitroeff, 20.6M) reports, "The Cuban government says it is on the brink of an extraordinary scientific achievement: the mass production of a coronavirus vaccine invented on the island." The Sovereign 2, "one of the four vaccines developed by Cuban scientists," is expected to "enter a final phase of testing next month, a crucial step toward regulatory approval that, if successful, could put the island on the path to inoculate its entire population and begin exports abroad by year's end." The article adds that a safe and effective homegrown vaccine "would hand the Cuban government a significant political victory – and a shot at rescuing the nation from economic ruin."

One-Third Of Military Service Members Have Chosen Not To Receive COVID-19 Vaccinations, Pentagon Officials Say.

CNN (2/17, Kaufman, Liebermann, 89.21M) reports that a third of US military service members "eligible to receive a Covid-19 vaccination have opted not to, defense officials said Monday as they announced the Department of Defense is nearing 1 million vaccinations delivered." Cautioning "that it's still 'very early data,' Maj. Gen. Jeff Taliaferro, vice director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the House Armed Services Committee Wednesday, 'The vaccine is the right thing to do, it's clearly safe for service members.'" The percentage of those "who have decided not

to receive a vaccine mirrors the acceptance rate across the United States, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Wednesday."

The Washington Post (2/17, Horton, 10.52M) reports, "The military mandates that service members receive a variety of vaccinations at enlistment, and often additional inoculations are required before deployments for typhoid, polio and other diseases." However, "the emergency use authorizations for the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccines prevent commanders from requiring their use without Food and Drug Administration approval, Taliaferro said."

Among other sources covering the story are Bloomberg (2/17, Tiron, 3.57M), the AP (2/17, Baldor), Politico (2/17, O'Brien, 6.73M), and the Washington Times (2/17, Glenn, 626K).

Pfizer Says South African Variant May Reduce Vaccine Protection.

Reuters (2/17, Erman) reports certain antibody protections created by the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine could be reduced by as much as two-thirds against the South African variant based on the results of a lab study. However, "the study found the vaccine was still able to neutralize the virus and there is not yet evidence from trials in people that the variant reduces vaccine protection."

STAT (2/17, Joseph, 262K) reports, "It can be difficult to extrapolate what such lab experiments mean for what happens if someone who received the vaccine is exposed to the variant." Because COVID-19 vaccines create other antibody types and T-cells, "it's possible that overall people retain more of their defenses in fending off the virus." The article adds that the vaccines also could still protect against severe COVID-19. The findings were published Wednesday in the New England Journal of Medicine.

CNN (2/17, Sealy, Bonifield, 89.21M) reports, "Separately, a team at the National Institutes of Health and Moderna published a letter in the same journal outlining findings from an experiment they reported last month." The team "also reported a reduction in the antibody response to viruses genetically engineered to look like the B.1.351 variant – but not enough of a reduction to make the vaccine work any less effectively."

Bloomberg (2/17, Kresge, Langreth, 3.57M) also covers the story.

Native Americans Embrace COVID-19 Vaccine In Greater Numbers Than Other Minority Communities.

The AP (2/17, Morgan) reports that while US minority communities have demonstrated distrust of COVID-19 vaccines, "the opposite is true for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, a Native American tribe of 16,000 in western North Carolina, and other tribes across the country, which were also quick to adopt coronavirus prevention measures." The "Indian Health Service said Tuesday that it has administered nearly 385,300 doses of COVID-19 vaccines." The article adds, "At a rate of about 18,490 per 100,000, that's higher than all but five U.S. states, according to an AP analysis of federal data."

Israeli Healthcare Provider Finds Pfizer Vaccine Was 95% Effective Against COVID-19 In Large Trial.

Reuters (2/17, Ayyub) reports Israel-based HMO Maccabi "said on Wednesday that Pfizer Inc's COVID-19 vaccine was 95% effective in a trial of 602,000 people, reinforcing the drugmaker's efficacy findings." The healthcare provider "said in a statement that only 608 people had tested positive for COVID-19 more than a week after receiving the second of two required Pfizer doses." In comparison, 20,621 out of a group "of 528,000 Israelis with similar backgrounds who did not receive the vaccine" tested positive.

Opinion: Pharmacies Are Vital To American COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout, But They Can Do More.

In an opinion in Bloomberg (2/17, 3.57M), contributors Scott Duke Kominers and Alex Tabarrok write that the involvement of pharmacies in America's COVID-19 vaccine rollout is "already driving improvements in the distribution of shots in the U.S." They explain, "Several states already rely on pharmacies to deliver most flu vaccines," and West Virginia, which has "the fastest and most complete Covid-19 vaccination record thus far, has used local pharmacies to deliver vaccines more than any other state – pioneering a combination approach in which the National Guard coordinates logistics while local pharmacies do the injections." However, they add, "because pharmacies, especially the smaller pharmacies, are not currently being used at maximum capacity to deliver the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, offering the Oxford-AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson vaccines more broadly through pharmacies would make it possible to add untapped, efficient capacity directly."

Many Americans Reportedly Experiencing "Vaccine Envy" As They Wait Their Turn For COVID-19 Vaccine.

USA Today (2/17, Dastagir, 12.7M) reports, "Public health officials warned it would take time to vaccinate everyone" against COVID-19 "who desired it." However, "most people...likely couldn't prepare for the feeling of watching as some people near a return to normal, while they continue to wait." The article examines the feelings of "vaccine envy" many Americans are experiencing as they watch others receive doses ahead of them.

COVID-19 Infection Rates Among People Who Received Moderna, Pfizer Vaccines Were Almost 89% Lower, Large-Scale Study Suggests.

Bloomberg (2/17, Langreth, 3.57M) reports a large-scale study has found that "COVID infection rates were almost 89% lower in people who received two doses of the Moderna Inc. or Pfizer Inc.-BioNTech SE vaccines, starting 36 days after their first shot." The report "used artificial intelligence software to scan the medical records of" 31,000 "early vaccine recipients at Mayo Clinic facilities" in four states. The article adds, "The findings are important because vaccine and drug efficacy in the real world often differs from what is seen in the carefully controlled environment of experimental clinical trials."

Barely 50% Of Americans Are Planning To Get COVID-19 Vaccine, Survey Finds.

The Washington Examiner (2/17, Bedard, 888K) reports data from the latest edition of the "Back-to-Normal Barometer" survey indicate barely 50% "of the nation is planning to get the coronavirus vaccine, a surprising slap to the White House that has spent weeks urging the nation to get stuck." Of the 50% who were not eager to receive the vaccine, the survey "said that 12% were somewhat ready, 15% were somewhat not ready, and 23% strongly said they won't get it." According to the article, "The poll shows that despite photos of the president, Dr. Anthony Fauci, governors, and celebrities receiving the vaccine, there is a lot of work to be done to convince a majority of the country to get it."

Fauci Says COVID-19 Vaccines Are "Light At The End Of The Tunnel."

The Helena (MT) Independent Record (2/17, Evans, 97K) reports NIAID Director "Dr. Anthony Fauci said the words many people have been waiting to hear when he called the COVID-19 vaccine the 'light at the end of the tunnel' during the University of Montana's annual Mansfield Lecture on Wednesday." However, "the pace at which the nation approaches the end of the pandemic depends on how many people get vaccinated, he said." He "said he thinks the United States will approach 'a degree of normality' by mid-fall or sooner 'if we could get past this issue of vaccine hesitancy where a significant number of people may not want to get vaccinated.'"

NIH RADx Team Closes Submission Process, Earmarks $1.2B To Support Coronavirus Diagnostics From Over 40 Labs, Companies.

GenomeWeb (2/17) reports the NIH "Rapid Acceleration of Diagnostics team has closed the submission process and earmarked $1.2 billion to support SARS-CoV-2 diagnostics from more than 40 labs and companies." The article adds, "The final RADx portfolio of products to be developed and scaled includes a diversity of diagnostics from companies such as Illumina, Quidel, Fluidigm, and Mesa Biotech, and is likely to result in a near-term manufacturing boom in rapid antigen tests and over-the-counter home-use diagnostics."

Taiwan To Receive COVID-19 Vaccines From BioNTech, Company Says.

Reuters (2/17) reports, "Germany's BioNTech SE plans to provide COVID-19 vaccine to Taiwan, the company said." Taiwan previously "complained the firm in December pulled out of a deal to buy 5 million doses at the last minute, possibly due to Chinese pressure." According to the article, "In an emailed statement late Wednesday, the company said it was planning on providing vaccine to Taiwan."

State Department Says US Will Pay Over $200M In Current Dues To WHO.

Roll Call (2/17, Oswald, 130K) reports that by the end of February, the US "will pay off the arrears it owes to the World Health Organization as well as its current year obligations, the State Department announced Wednesday." Speaking to "the U.N. Security Council, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States would provide more than $200 million 'in assessed and current obligations to the WHO' as a 'key step' toward complying with U.S. financial obligations as a member country." Blinken said the move "reflects our renewed commitment to ensuring the

WHO has the support it needs to lead the global response to the pandemic, even as we work to reform it for the future."

India To Make COVID-19 Molecular Tests Mandatory For People Arriving From UK, South Africa, Brazil.

Reuters (2/18, Das) reports, "India will make COVID-19 molecular tests mandatory for people arriving directly or indirectly from the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil in a bid to contain the spread of more infectious virus variants found in those countries." India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare stated, "All the travellers arriving transitioning through flights originating in [the] United Kingdom, Europe or the Middle East shall be mandatorily subjected to self-paid confirmatory molecular tests on arrival."

Nepal Authorizes COVID-19 Vaccine Developed By Sinopharm Affiliate.

Reuters (2/18, Sharma) reports, "Nepal approved on Thursday the emergency use of a COVID-19 vaccine developed by an affiliate of China's Sinopharm, a government official said, the second vaccine cleared after AstraZeneca's product." The approval will enable "China to donate 500,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine to the Himalayan nation, which last month received one million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine free of charge from" India.

Winter Weather Delays Delivery Of COVID-19 Vaccines Across The US.

CNN (2/17, Croft, Gumbrecht, Sanchez, 89.21M) reports, "Severe weather around the United States will delay Covid-19 vaccine deliveries in the coming days, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Wednesday." FedEx and UPS said they have contingency plans in place; however, these delays could last up to two weeks.

Newsweek (2/17, Kim, 2.67M) reports on multiple states' reactions to the winter weather and how each state plans to alter its vaccine rollout.

Among other news outlets covering the story are US News & World Report (2/17, Smith-Schoenwalder, 1.91M), the AP (2/17, Noveck, Naishadham), ABC World News Tonight (2/17, Muir, 7.78M), CBS Evening News (2/17, O'Donnell, 5.7M), and NBC Nightly News (2/17, Holt, 8.26M).

New York Governor Accused Of Threatening Assemblyman Who Criticized Him.

USA Today (2/17, Campbell, 12.7M) reports, "New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo [D] launched into a heated criticism Wednesday of one of the most vocal critics of his COVID-19 nursing home policies, state assemblyman [Ron Kim (D)] who claims the governor threatened to 'destroy' him on a private phone call."

The New York Times (2/17, Ferré-Sadurní, McKinley, 20.6M) says the governor "was angered and combative about a letter published by The New York Post that was signed by several Assembly members, including Mr. Kim." The letter cited Cuomo's "delays in releasing a complete tally of deaths of nursing home residents...[and] accused Mr. Cuomo of attempting to circumvent a federal probe and 'intentional obstruction of justice.'"

According to CNN (2/17, Lee, Morales, 89.21M), Cuomo's senior adviser Rich Azzopardi said, "Kim's assertion that the governor said he would 'destroy him' is false."

Other news outlets covering the story include The Hill (2/17, Choi, 5.69M), National Review (2/17, Evans, 798K), Politico New York (2/17, Young), the AP (2/17, Villeneuve), Bloomberg (2/17, Clukey, Braun, 3.57M), the Washington Post (2/17, Bump, 10.52M), Forbes (2/17, Walsh, 10.33M), and the Intelligencer (2/17, Prater, 1.3M).

FBI, US Attorney Investigating New York Governor's Handling Of Nursing Homes During The COVID-19 Pandemic.

The New York Times (2/17, A1, McKinley, Ferré-Sadurní, 20.6M) reports, "The Democratic leaders of the New York State Senate are moving to strip Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of unilateral emergency powers granted during the pandemic, setting up a remarkable rebuke for the governor from members of his own party." These proposals, "which could be voted on as soon as next week, underscore the deepening division between Mr. Cuomo and state lawmakers since the governor admitted to intentionally withholding critical data on virus-related deaths from the Legislature." Meanwhile, it has "emerged that the F.B.I. and the U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of New York had opened an inquiry into the Cuomo administration's handling of nursing homes during the pandemic."

The New York Post (2/17, Garger, Celona, Hicks, 7.45M) reports this investigation "is examining the Cuomo administration's actions relating to the nursing homes and other long-term care facilities after thousands of their residents died of COVID-19, according to two sources familiar with the matter." According to The Times Union, the probe, for now, "is focusing on some senior members of Cuomo's coronavirus task force."

The AP (2/17, Balsamo, Villeneuve) reports "the U.S. Justice Department has been examining the governor's coronavirus task force and trying to determine whether the state intentionally manipulated data regarding deaths in nursing homes, two people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press."

Among other news outlets covering the story are The Hill (2/17, Budryk, 5.69M), the New York Daily News (2/17, Slattery, 2.51M) and the Wall Street Journal (2/18, Vielkind, Subscription Publication, 8.41M).

Opinion: New York Governor's Actions Worse Than A Coverup.

In an opinion piece for the Washington Post (2/17, 10.52M), columnist Marc Thiessen says New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) "is under bipartisan fire after an aide admitted that his administration deliberately delayed releasing information showing the true extent of covid-19 deaths in New York nursing homes." Thiessen argues, "Stonewalling the Justice Department is bad enough, but Cuomo did something even worse: His administration provided inaccurate data to public health officials." He concludes, "Cuomo's actions certainly merit his removal from office – not just for the coverup, but for the actions he took that impeded our national response to the worst pandemic in American history."

Opinion: New Yorkers Living In Discouraging Reality Under Gov. Cuomo.

In an opinion piece for the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), Daniel Henninger expresses his dissatisfaction with New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's (D) management of the COVID-19 pandemic and discusses what life is like for New Yorkers.

New York To Reopen Indoor Family Entertainment, Outdoor Amusement Parks.

CNBC (2/17, Higgins-Dunn, 7.34M) reports, "New York is forging ahead with reopening more businesses amid a post-holiday decline in Covid-19 cases, but the governor said the state is keeping 'one eye' on troublesome variants of the virus that could reverse its progress." On Wednesday, Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) announced "indoor family entertainment centers, such as arcades, trampoline parks and laser tag facilities, will be allowed to reopen starting March 26 at 25% capacity with additional precautions," and "outdoor amusement parks can reopen on April 9 at 33% capacity."

Nebraska Likely To Receive More Than 60K COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.

The AP (2/17) reports, "Nebraska is likely to receive more than 60,000 doses of coronavirus vaccines this week." The state "is focusing most of its vaccination efforts on residents who are at least 65 years old," but "Gov. Pete Ricketts [R] said his administration has also directed local public health agencies to give priority to first responders, law enforcement, correctional workers, and people who work on public utilities, among others."

LA County Elementary Schools Allowed To Reopen, But Return To Class Will Be Uneven.

The Los Angeles Times (2/17, Newberry, 3.37M) reports that while coronavirus rates in Los Angeles County "have finally dropped low enough to allow for the immediate reopening of elementary schools," there will be "an uneven return to class." The Times adds, "Smaller school systems in more prosperous communities...appear poised to quickly expand in-person instruction." Larger districts and those serving low-income areas, however, have "concerns about vaccinations for school staff and community anxiety over health risks are making for harder decisions."

LATimes: LA Unified School District Superintendent Needs To Demand Teachers Return To Classrooms.

An editorial in the Los Angeles Times (2/17, 3.37M) says, "Supt. Austin Beutner, who has been struggling with a teachers union unwilling to send educators back into classrooms, couldn't have opened the schools [in Los Angeles county] anyway because the county's infection rate was too high to meet the state's stringent standards." However, this week, rates "fell to the point where it is officially safe for all elementary schools in the county to open." The Times adds the Los Angeles Unified School District superintendent "needs to put on his big-boy pants, reopen schools and demand that teachers return or risk their jobs."

California's COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Does Not Prioritize Some Essential Workers.

The Los Angeles Times (2/17, Castillo, 3.37M) reports, "Millions of front-line workers in California are falling through the cracks of an undersupplied COVID-19 vaccine distribution system, putting entire communities at prolonged risk of illness." California "has prioritized some essential workers for vaccines," but Phase 1B does not include "high-risk workers at farms, restaurants and grocery stores."

First Two FEMA Mass COVID-19 Vaccination Sites Open In California.

The Hill (2/17, Sullivan, 5.69M) reports, "The first two mass vaccination sites run by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) opened Tuesday in California." They are located at the Oakland-Alameda Coliseum and California State University Los Angeles.

North Carolina Alters COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Guidance, Making It Permissible To Refuse COVID-19 Vaccine To Travelers.

The AP (2/17, Anderson) reports North Carolina is changing "its vaccine distribution guidance to dissuade people from traveling long distances to receive a COVID-19 shot in the state." The state DHHS said, "To promote the public health goals for North Carolina, it is permissible to not offer vaccine to temporary travelers who do not reside, work, or spend significant time in the North Carolina."

Michigan Restaurants Propose Tying Indoor Capacity Limits To COVID-19 Positivity Rate.

The AP (2/17, Eggert) reports, "Michigan restaurants on Wednesday proposed tying indoor capacity limits to the percentage of COVID-19 tests that come back positive, contending that clear guideposts would help the hospitality industry navigate the pandemic." However, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D) "has opposed linking coronavirus metrics to the automatic loosening or tightening of restrictions."

Other news outlets covering the story include the Detroit Free Press (2/17, Selasky, 2.16M), the Detroit News (2/17, Mauger, 1.16M) and MLive (MI) (2/17, DesOrmeau, 828K).

More Than 100K COVID-19 Vaccine Appointments Delayed In Pennsylvania.

The Allentown (PA) Morning Call (2/17, Turner, 460K) reports, "Problems in Pennsylvania's rollout of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine have caused shortages, prompting a shake-up in scheduling that could delay shots for more than 100,000 people, a top state official said Wednesday."

Massachusetts Residents Aged 65-74, Those With Underlying Health Conditions Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine.

The AP (2/17) reports that on Wednesday, Massachusetts health officials said people aged 65 and older are now eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. Residents with more than one underlying medical condition can also register for inoculation.

According to the Boston Globe (2/17, Weisman, Pan, Andersen, Lazar, 1.04M), underlying conditions include asthma, "cancer; chronic kidney disease; chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; Down syndrome; heart conditions, such as heart failure and coronary artery disease;

being immunocompromised; pregnancy; sickle cell disease; obesity; smoking; and type 2 diabetes."

The Boston Herald (2/17, Tiernan, 327K) and the Cape Cod (MA) Times (2/17, McCormick, 64K) also report.

Massachusetts Legislators To Hold Oversight Hearings On State's COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.

The Boston Herald (2/17, Tiernan, 327K) reports Massachusetts legislators "will hold a series of oversight hearings on the state's 'constantly changing and confusing vaccination roll out.'" The article adds, "The newly-created Joint Committee on Covid-19 and Emergency Preparedness and Management will hold its first hearing on Feb. 25."

Colorado Governor Will Not Allow Denver Mayor To Administer COVID-19 Vaccine To Homeless Ahead Of Schedule.

The Denver Post (2/17, Swanson, 660K) reports Denver Mayor Michael Hancock (D) would like to deviate from Colorado's "state-mandated [COVID-19] vaccine priority list" and inoculate the city's homeless population. However, Gov. Jared Polis (D) will not grant the mayor authority to do so ahead of schedule.

More Than 695K Minnesotans Have Received The COVID-19 Vaccine.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune (2/17, Olson, 855K) reports, "More than 695,000 people in Minnesota have received COVID-19 vaccine, according to the latest state figures on Wednesday, including nearly 25% of teachers and 40% of senior citizens."

Minnesota Governor Wants All Schools To Offer Some Form Of In-Person Learning By March 8.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune (2/17, Golden, Olson, 855K) reports that on Wednesday, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz (DFL) said all schools throughout the state "should offer some form of in-person instruction by March 8." He "said he's confident Minnesota is ready to reopen classrooms because it has developed and invested in the kind of efforts needed to operate schools in a pandemic."

New Jersey Governor Extends Public-Health Emergency To Mid-March.

NJ News (2/17, Johnson, 1.47M) reports Gov. Phil Murphy (D) "extended New Jersey's public-health emergency over the coronavirus pandemic for a 12th time." The executive order "extends the declaration until at least mid-March."

Error Causes Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine Shortage In Pennsylvania.

The AP (2/17, Rubinkam) reports, "Pennsylvania is facing a temporary shortage of booster shots of the Moderna vaccine because providers inadvertently used them as first doses, setting back the state's already stumbling vaccine rollout." According to acting Health Secretary Alison Beam, some

"30,000 to 60,000 appointments for the COVID-19 booster shot will need to be pushed back by one or two weeks."

The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review (2/17, Guza, 245K) and the Reading (PA) Eagle (2/17, Hasty, 119K) also report.

Editorial: California Governor Turns To Corporate Contacts To Roll Out COVID-19 Vaccine.

In an editorial, the San Francisco Chronicle (2/17, 2.44M) says, "Gov. Gavin Newsom [D] has fallen back on a favorite strategy to address California's rickety vaccination effort: a pair of highly touted, reluctantly disclosed corporate contracts." The state will partner with Blue Shield and Kaiser Permanente to roll out the COVID-19 vaccine. The Chronicle adds, "There is a familiar and troubling appearance of coziness about the contracts, which were granted on an emergency basis without the benefit – or hindrance, depending on one's perspective – of a bidding process."

Colorado Governor Urges Congress To Take Action On COVID-19 Stimulus Plan.

The AP (2/17, Nieberg) reports, "Colorado Gov. Jared Polis [D] urged lawmakers Wednesday to take quick action on a $1 billion-plus stimulus plan [and] lower taxes to jump-start the economy."

Iowa Cancels Deal With Microsoft To Develop Centralized System For COVID-19 Vaccine Scheduling.

The AP (2/17, Pitt) reports on Wednesday, officials in Iowa "said they have cancelled a deal with Microsoft Corp. to develop a centralized online system." Gov. Kim Reynolds (R) said, "When we dug into what the options were and what was available and the timeline to get that done it just didn't make sense for us to move forward, especially with the registration and scheduling component." She did not offer further details.

Detroiters Aged 60-64 With Chronic Medical Conditions Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine.

The Detroit Free Press (2/17, Hall, 2.16M) reports that on Wednesday, Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan (D) announced "Detroiters age[d] 60 and older with chronic medical conditions...are now eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine."

The Detroit News (2/17, Rahal, 1.16M) says, "Residents who qualify include those with cancer, asthma, heart conditions, hypertension, diabetes, cerebrovascular disease, chronic kidney disease, pulmonary fibrosis, cardiomyopathy, HIV, liver disease, coronary artery disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cystic fibrosis, dementia, sickle cell disease and Alzheimer's disease."

Crain's Detroit Business (2/17, Frank, 84K) also reports.

Connecticut Legislators Conclude 24-Hour Hearing On Vaccination Rules For Public School Children.

The Hartford (CT) Courant (2/17, Altimari, 438K) reports that around 9 a.m. on Wednesday, Connecticut legislators concluded a 24-hour public hearing focused on vaccination rules for public school children. Under current law, parents can raise religious objections to "bypass the

requirement that children must be inoculated against...highly contagious preventable diseases before enrolling in school." However, proposed legislation "would eliminate the religious exemption and bar unvaccinated children from public schools."

Soft Launch Of Nevada's New COVID-19 Vaccine Appointment Registration System To Occur Next Week.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal (2/17, Davidson, 372K) reports, "Nevada is on the cusp of launching a statewide COVID-19 vaccine appointment registration system, with a soft launch planned in Clark County next week." It is expected to replace individual systems used by local governments, but will not be required. DHHS confirmed it is "a voluntary program."

Californians With Low Incomes To Receive $600 Stimulus Payment Under $9.6B COVID-19 Economic Recovery Package.

The Los Angeles Times (2/17, McGreevy, 3.37M) reports California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) and legislative leaders announced a $600 state stimulus payment will be issued to low-income residents. It is "part of a $9.6-billion [COVID-19] economic recovery package."

According to the AP (2/17, Ronayne, Thompson), "About 5.7 million people who earn less than $30,000 per year would get one-time payments."

USA Today (2/17, Gieseke, 12.7M) reports the recovery package allocates "$2.1 billion in grants for small businesses."

The San Francisco Chronicle (2/17, Koseff, 2.44M) also reports.

Op-Ed: Los Angeles' Distribution Of COVID-19 Vaccines A "Confusing" Process.

In an op-ed for the Los Angeles Times (2/17, 3.37M), executive administrator of Continuum of Care Operations and Value Improvement at Keck Medicine of USC Felipe Osorno says, "While Los Angeles may be breathing easier with the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines, many of us have been dismayed by what can be a confusing distribution process." Since he oversees vaccination efforts at Keck Medicine, Osorno created "a wish list of potential improvements" to the vaccine distribution process.

Florida Governor Defends Controversial COVID-19 Pop-Up Vaccination Clinic In Affluent Community.

CNN (2/17, Toropin, 89.21M) reports Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) "has threatened to move a pop-up vaccination clinic that his state has set up in an affluent community in Manatee County after he was confronted with allegations of political favoritism and preference for the wealthy at a news conference Wednesday." DeSantis said, "It wasn't a choice about zip codes, it was a choice about where's a high concentration of seniors where you could have communities provide the ability for them to go on (to get vaccinated). ... If Manatee County doesn't like us doing this, then we are totally fine with putting this in counties that want it."

The Hill (2/17, Gstalter, 5.69M) and Politico (2/17, Sarkissian, Dixon, 6.73M) also report.

Maine AG Issues Warning Against Administering COVID-19 Vaccine To Ineligible People.

The AP (2/16) reports Maine's Attorney General Aaron Frey (D) "has issued a warning to health care providers in the state against administering COVID-19 vaccines to ineligible people." The warning is "in response to reports of improper administration of the vaccines."

Chicago Spent $281.5M Of $1.2B COVID-19 Pandemic Relief Money On Police Department.

The AP (2/17) says, "Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot [D] spent millions of dollars in federal COVID-19 relief money on the personnel costs for the police department." The article says according to the Chicago Tribune, "of the $1.2 billion Chicago received from the federal government to help plug budget holes caused the drop of revenue due to the pandemic, $281.5 million went to the Chicago Police Department."

California Fines McDonald's Franchisee For Firing Workers Who Raise COVID-19 Safety Concerns.

The Los Angeles Times (2/17, Miller, 3.37M) reports, "The California Labor Commissioner has fined a McDonald's franchisee for firing four employees who participated in strikes to protest coronavirus safety conditions in their Los Angeles workplace."

Nevadans Aged 65-69 Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine Next Week.

The AP (2/17, Metz) reports that beginning next week, Nevadans aged 65-69 will be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine.

Ohio Senate Passes Bill To Limit Governor's Health Orders.

The AP (2/17, Amiri) reports, "A small committee of legislators could overrule the Ohio governor's health orders under a bill the state Senate approved Wednesday." The proposed legislation "would create a committee that would have the power to rescind executive actions taken by any governor or state health department through a concurrent resolution, which requires a simple majority from the House and Senate."

NYC Fixing COVID-19 Vaccine Registration System.

The New York Post (2/17, Hicks, 7.45M) reports New York City officials "said...they are finally creating a single website where New Yorkers can book appointments for COVID-19 vaccines at all city-run locations." The website "is currently being used by the city Health Department's 15 vaccine distribution sites at high school campuses – and will soon add two more new mass vaccination sites to its roster."

Cannabis Workers, Veterinarians Receive Top Priority For COVID-19 Vaccine In California.

The San Francisco Chronicle (2/17, Williams, 2.44M) reports, "Medical marijuana workers now have priority access to the coronavirus vaccine, under revised California guidelines." Some medical cannabis workers are in the "top slot – known as 1a – of vaccination priorities," putting them in

the same category as front line medical workers. The new guidelines also included "veterinary services employees in Phase 1b, Tier 1."

Leaders In DC Area Begin Lifting Some COVID-19 Restrictions.

The Washington Post (2/17, Zauzmer, Schneider, 10.52M) reports, "Leaders in Maryland and Virginia eased up on some pandemic-related restrictions Wednesday as the rate of new coronavirus infections continued to fall from its winter peak." Additionally, DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson (D) asked "the city's health department to consider loosening restrictions on youth sports."

Biden's Openness On Minimum Wage Negotiations May Not Please Progressives.

The Washington Post (2/17, Alemany, Raji, 10.52M) reports that President Biden's "road to the White House was paved in part with a pledge to increase the national minimum wage to $15 an hour. At his first official 2020 campaign event, Biden called for the hike in front of crowded union hall in Pittsburgh." The majority of Democrats "rallied around the idea of including the $15 minimum wage in Biden's $1.9 trillion coronavirus stimulus package, before he suggested it might not survive the budget reconciliation process and might need to be a stand-alone measure." And Biden "signaled during a CNN town hall last night in Wisconsin he is open to negotiating a longer phase-in for the hike, explaining a lower number like $12 to $13 an hour 'could be beneficial while having less potential impact on business owners,' per my colleague Erica Werner."

Debate Over Whether $15 Minimum Wage Would Boost Workers Or Kill Jobs Rages.

The AP (2/17, Wiseman) reports, "Will the Biden administration succeed in enacting a much higher federal minimum wage – and should it?" The Administration "has cast its campaign to raise the minimum as a way to lift up millions of the working poor, reduce America's vast financial inequality and help boost the economy." Yet "just this month, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated that while raising the minimum wage to $15 by 2025 would increase pay for 17 million people and pull 900,000 out of poverty, it would also end 1.4 million jobs."

Consumers Used Stimulus Checks To Boost Economy, Retail Spending In January.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Torry, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that American consumers boosted the US economy by spending their stimulus checks, sending retail spending to its biggest increase in seven months in January. Retail sales jumped a seasonally adjusted 5.3% in January from the previous month, as manufacturing output rose to pre-pandemic levels.

Millions Of US Jobs Unlikely To Come Back After Pandemic, Economists Warn.

The Washington Post (2/17, Long, 10.52M) reports, "Millions of jobs that have been shortchanged or wiped out entirely by the coronavirus pandemic are unlikely to come back, economists warn, setting up a massive need for career changes and retraining in the United States." The coronavirus pandemic "has triggered permanent shifts in how and where people work." Businesses "are planning for a future where more people are working from home, traveling less for business, or

replacing workers with robots." All of these changes "mean many workers will not be able to do the same job they did before the pandemic, even after much of the U.S. population gets vaccinated against the deadly virus."

As Democrats Work To Pass Virus Relief, Divisions Appear On Next Legislative Package.

The Washington Post (2/17, Werner, Stein, Grandoni, 10.52M) reports, "Even as President Biden and congressional Democrats work to pass their $1.9 trillion coronavirus relief bill, they're bracing for the next big legislative scramble, over another massive spending bill that's already drawing intense lobbying and threatening Democratic unity." Biden's next package "could be far pricier than the coronavirus bill." Although plans "remain fluid, it's expected to center on a major infrastructure investment, while also tackling other priorities such as clean energy, domestic manufacturing, and child and elder care."

Democrats Face Internal Clash Over Raising Minimum Wage.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Duehren, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that Democrats are preparing for an internecine battle over increasing the minimum wage to $15 per hour. President Biden's coronavirus stimulus proposes to accomplish that goal by 2025, but it is opposed by some Democratic lawmakers. Democrats must remain unanimous in the 50-50 Senate to pass legislation. The Los Angeles Times (2/17, Haberkorn, 3.37M) reports that progressives, "who have long rallied for the policy, say it would help stimulate an economy hampered by the pandemic." They "view the bill as the best vehicle to get the wage increase passed into law." Biden "supports the goal, but is pumping the brakes on whether it should be part of the stimulus package." For starters, Biden, "a pragmatist who spent decades in the Senate, worries a minimum-wage hike provision will be deemed inappropriate under the special reconciliation process that Democrats are using to pass the bill."

Allies Creating Nonprofit Group To Push Bidens' Agenda.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Day, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports allies of President Biden "are preparing to create a new nonprofit advocacy organization, with the White House's approval, that will be funded by donors and seek to build support for his policy agenda, senior administration officials said." The group, "whose working name is 'Building Back Together,' is expected to run advertisements promoting the president's policies and coordinate with existing nonprofit advocacy organizations on issues such as Covid-19, climate change and the economy."

Opinion: Debate Over Pandemic Relief Ignoring Shifting Of Jobs From One Sector To Another.

In an article for Bloomberg Opinion (2/17), columnist Peter R. Orszag writes, "The debate in Congress over pandemic relief is overlooking something crucial: the shifting of jobs from one sector to another that is to be expected after the health crisis ends. This coming reallocation in the economy adds to the arguments in favor of spending $1.9 trillion on pandemic relief." Orszag argues, "Basically, when economic turmoil is rising under the surface – as some companies

contract sharply and others expand quickly – a larger relief package is helpful, as long as its provisions don't freeze-frame the past. As lawmakers debate the size of the legislation in the coming days and weeks, they should keep in mind the reallocation shock that's embodied in the pandemic."

Opinion: Biden Relief Package Would Give Congress Time To Work On Longer-Term Answer To Health Insurance.

In an opinion piece for the Los Angeles Times (2/17, 3.37M), Deputy Editorial Page Editor Jon Healey writes, "On the campaign trail, Joe Biden pledged to use the Affordable Care Act as a foundation for extending health insurance to all Americans. And in his first major legislative proposal – a $1.9-trillion COVID-19 relief package – Biden is trying to take the first steps in that direction." Healey writes, "Biden's proposal...would provide larger premium subsidies for two years to the vast majority of people who buy coverage through the state Obamacare exchanges." Healey argues, "The COVID relief bill would buy Congress time to work on a longer-term answer... . At some point, however, they are going to have to grapple with the incessant increase in healthcare spending, or live with the consequences of healthcare bills consuming a larger and larger share of the economy, crowding out potentially more productive uses of our dollars."

IRS: Some Stimulus Checks May Still Be In The Mail.

USA Today (2/17, Collins, 12.7M) reports that the IRS "announced this week that the federal government has distributed all stimulus checks it is legally permitted to issue under two laws passed last year by Congress and signed by former President Donald Trump to provide a cash infusion for Americans recovering from the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic." The agency "said all payments have been delivered based on the information it has on file for those who are eligible, but it stressed that some checks may still be in the mail." Some "13 million checks were mistakenly sent to bank accounts or addresses that are no longer valid and had to be redirected."

Biden's COVID-19 Relief Legislation Is Also An ACA Expansion Bill.

Vox (2/17, Scott, 1.88M) reports that the Covid-19 relief package "proposed by President Joe Biden and being considered by Democrats in Congress could expand health care coverage to millions of people, the most significant step in the last 10 years toward patching up some of the holes in the Affordable Care Act." The ACA "led to a historically low uninsured rate in the US – 8.6 percent in 2016 – but the number of uninsured Americans started ticking up again during the Trump administration, rising to 9.2 percent by 2019." Then "millions of people lost their insurance (along with their jobs) during the coronavirus pandemic."

Proposals Could Result In Universal Basic Income For Kids In US.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Ip, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that both President Biden and Sen. Mitt Romney (R-UT) have proposed strongly expanding the child tax credit in ways

that essentially create a near-universal basic income for children. Both men aim to reduce child poverty, and their proposals would cut that number by about 3 million.

COVID-19 Vaccine Collaboration Illustrates Potential Of Public-Private Partnerships, Teva Executive Says.

In an opinion piece for the Morning Consult (2/17, Baeder, 3K), Christine Baeder, SVP and chief operating officer for US Generics at Teva Pharmaceuticals, writes that the rapid arrival of COVID-19 vaccines illustrates "public-private success from which FDA and the generic pharmaceutical industry can take lessons to accomplish other pivotal public health goals." In particular, she says "one imminent opportunity is ensuring the timely approval of generic versions of complex medicines – therapies which include auto-injectors like EpiPen and inhalers used to treat asthma – that are critical to the care of many serious and chronic medical conditions."

HHS Signs Contract For Special Syringes To Extract Six Doses Of Pfizer Vaccine.

Politico (2/17, Cancryn, Luthi, Ehley, Lim, Ollstein, 6.73M) reports that HHS "signed a five-month, $54.2 million deal with Retractable Technologies for extra-efficient syringes necessary to extract six doses of Pfizer's Covid vaccine from what were originally labeled five-dose vials." The contract, "disclosed in a Securities and Exchange Commission filing Tuesday, allows the federal government to exercise up to seven one-month extensions, for a maximum cost of about $93 million."

UN Chief Calls For Global Vaccination Plan To Ensure Equitable COVID-19 Shot Distribution.

The AP (2/17, Lederer) reports, "U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres sharply criticized the 'wildly uneven and unfair' distribution of COVID-19 vaccines on Wednesday, saying 10 countries have administered 75 percent of all vaccinations and demanding a global effort to get all people in every nation vaccinated as soon as possible." Guterres "told a high-level meeting of the U.N. Security Council that 130 countries have not received a single dose of vaccine and declared that 'at this critical moment, vaccine equity is the biggest moral test before the global community.'" In light of this, "Guterres called for an urgent Global Vaccination Plan to bring together those with the power to ensure equitable vaccine distribution – scientists, vaccine producers and those who can fund the effort."

Developing Countries Falling Dangerously Behind On COVID-19 Vaccinations.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Shah, Steinhauser, Solomon, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that less developed countries are now falling dangerously behind COVID-9 vaccination goals as more variants spread, making it even harder to catch up.

HuffPost (2/17, 363K) reports similarly.

EU Says It Is On Track To Have Up To 2.6 Billion COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.

The AP (2/17, Jordans, Petrequin) reports that "amid signs that more infectious coronavirus variants are spreading unchecked across Europe, governments and EU leaders scrambled

Wednesday to speed up vaccine efforts that have been hampered by limited supplies and to fund ways to hunt down variants and counter them." The European Union "announced Wednesday that it has agreed to buy a further 300 million doses of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine and was injecting almost a quarter of a billion euros (almost $300 million) into efforts to combat virus variants." The AP adds that "the news came only hours after Pfizer and BioNTech said they had signed a deal to deliver an additional 200 million vaccine doses to the bloc. ... 'With a portfolio of up to 2.6 billion doses, we will be able to provide vaccines not just to our citizens, but to our neighbors and partners as well,' EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said."

South Africa Begins Administering J&J's COVID-19 Vaccine.

The AP (2/17, Imray, Magome) reports, "South Africa has put its faith in the J&J vaccine after a large international clinical trial showed it to be effective in offering protection from the variant first identified in the country in December. Early results from that trial showed it had 57% efficacy against moderate to severe cases of COVID-19 caused by the variant, and a higher efficacy against severe illness and hospitalization." If the vaccination effort is successful in South Africa it "could also embolden the rest of the continent, where fears that poor countries are being left behind in the vaccine race are keenly felt."

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Steinhauser, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) also reports.

Some European Healthcare Workers Pushing For COVID-19 Vaccines From Moderna, Pfizer Over AstraZeneca.

Bloomberg (2/17, Kresge, Loh, Rogers, 3.57M) reports that while just "weeks ago, the European Union was clamoring for AstraZeneca Plc's Covid-19 vaccine," at this current time, "fewer than one-tenth of the doses delivered to Germany have been administered in the initial days of the roll-out, and some health-care workers say they're concerned about side effects." Similarly, "some French health workers are also pushing to get shots from Moderna Inc., Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE instead."

Pfizer Has Yet To Deliver Roughly 10 Million COVID-19 Vaccine Doses To EU Due In December.

Reuters (2/17, Guarascio) reports, "Pfizer has not yet delivered to the European Union about 10 million COVID-19 vaccine doses that were due in December, EU officials said, leaving it about one-third short of the supplies it had expected by now from the U.S. company." This most recent delay "raises questions about the rationale of an EU vaccine export control scheme which was set up in late January to ensure timely deliveries but has not yet been activated, despite the supply shortfalls."

Central European Leaders Push For Faster COVID-19 Vaccine Deliveries.

The AP (2/17, Scislowska) reports, "Central European leaders on Wednesday pushed for speedier deliveries of COVID-19 vaccines from every reliable manufacturer to speed up inoculations which they said is the way to conquer the pandemic and jump-start Europe's economic recovery."

Notably, "leaders of Hungary, Slovakia and Poland said they support purchasing vaccines from manufacturers regardless of 'geopolitics' provided they are safe and effective."

Japan Launches COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign.

The AP (2/17, Yamaguchi) reports, "Japan launched its coronavirus vaccination campaign Wednesday, months after other major economies started giving shots and amid questions about whether the drive would...reach enough people quickly enough to save a Summer Olympics already delayed by the pandemic."

Senegal To Receive 200,000 Doses Of Sinopharm's COVID-19 Vaccine.

The AP (2/17, Dione) reports, "Senegal is to receive 200,000 doses of the Chinese COVID-19 vaccine Sinopharm Wednesday."

Reuters (2/17, Bell, Felix) also reports.

Britain Becomes First Country To Approve Human Challenge Trials For COVID-19.

Reuters (2/17, Sandle, Kelland) reports, "Britain became the first country in the world on Wednesday to give the go-ahead for human challenge trials in which volunteers will deliberately be exposed to COVID-19 to advance research into the disease caused by the novel coronavirus." The new "trial, due to start within a month, will see up to 90 healthy volunteers aged between 18 and 30 exposed to the smallest amount of the virus needed to cause infection, scientists behind the plans told reporters at a news briefing."

Also reporting are the Washington Post (2/17, Adam, 10.52M), the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Strasburg, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), CNN (2/17, Braithwaite, 89.21M), Politico Europe (2/17, Furlong, 15K), The Hill (2/17, Axelrod, 5.69M), and the New York Times (2/17, Mueller, 20.6M).

Britain Proposes UN Draft Resolution Calling For COVID-19 Vaccination Ceasefires.

Reuters (2/17, Nichols) reports, "Britain on Wednesday proposed that the U.N. Security Council call for ceasefires to allow for COVID-19 vaccinations, a move that will be a key test of cooperation at the United Nations between China and new U.S. President Joe Biden's administration." UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab is calling for the Security Council to swiftly adopt "a draft resolution calling for vaccination ceasefires, warning that 160 million people are at risk of missing out due to instability and conflict."

Turkey To Slowly Return To Normal Life On Regional Basis Starting Next Month, Erdogan Says.

Reuters (2/17) reports, "Turkey will begin a gradual return to normal life on a province-by-province basis from March, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday, adding that nationwide weekend COVID-19 lockdowns would be lifted in some provinces based on infection rates."

Venezuela To Start Vaccinating Medical Personnel Against COVID-19 This Week, Maduro Says.

Reuters (2/17) reports, "Venezuela will begin vaccinating medical personnel against the novel coronavirus on Thursday, President Nicolas Maduro said in a press conference on Wednesday." His "announcement comes after the first 100,000 doses of Russia's Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine arrived in the South American country on Saturday."

India Offers To Vaccinate All UN Peacekeepers Globally Against COVID-19.

Reuters (2/17, Nichols) reports, "India on Wednesday offered a COVID-19 vaccine to all United Nations peacekeepers – nearly 95,000 troops in 12 missions around the world."

China Blocking Taiwan's Attempt To Purchase Five Million COVID-19 Doses From BioNTech, Health Minister Says.

Bloomberg (2/17, Horton, 3.57M) reports, "Taiwan's attempts to purchase 5 million doses of BioNTech SE's Covid-19 vaccine fell apart at the last minute, Taiwan's health minister said Wednesday, voicing concern that political pressure from Beijing may have scuppered the deal." Although "Taiwan's government was making final preparations to sign a deal with Germany-based BioNTech in January," things suddenly changed, according to minister Chen Shih-chung during "an interview on radio station Hit FM Wednesday." He said that potential arrangements were disrupted by "external forces," adding, "There are some people that don't want Taiwan to be too happy."

Israel Allows Palestinian Authority To Deliver First COVID-19 Vaccines To Gaza Strip.

The AP (2/17, Akram, Krauss) reports that on Wednesday, Israel "allowed the Palestinian Authority to deliver the first coronavirus vaccines to the Gaza Strip...despite objections from Israeli lawmakers who suggested they be used as a bargaining chip for the release of captives held by the territory's militant Hamas rulers."

The Washington Post (2/17, Hendrix, Rubin, 10.52M) reports that "some right-wing Israeli politicians and activists want to condition the delivery of vaccines on the release of hostages and human remains held by Hamas."

The Hill (2/17, 5.69M) also reports.

Tanzania's President Falsely Claims His Country Is "COVID-Free."

The Washington Post (2/17, Ombuor, Bearak, 10.52M) reports, "Tanzania's president [John Magufuli] recently rejected any need for coronavirus vaccines, instead promoting herbal cures." The leader "claims the nation of 60 million has been "COVID-free" since he presided over three days of national prayer in June." Despite his claim, "the U.S. Embassy in Tanzania says the country has seen a significant increase in cases over the past month."

Belgian Teachers Threaten To Strike Unless They Get Access To COVID-19 Vaccines.

The Washington Post (2/17, Birnbaum, Ariès, 10.52M) reports that in Belgium, despite schools already being reopened, "teachers who found themselves left off a priority list for [COVID-19] vaccinations are threatening to strike unless they receive doses." This "dispute may foreshadow more disruptions to fragile pandemic-era arrangements, as some groups decide they are less willing to take risks now that society could choose to inoculate them – but won't until vaccines are in greater supply."

Russia, China Using COVID-19 Vaccine Supply To Boost Geopolitical Influence.

CNBC (2/17, Meredith, 7.34M) reports, "International diplomacy is likely to determine who gets access to coronavirus vaccines over the coming months, analysts have told CNBC, with countries such as Russia and China seen using one of the world's most in-demand commodities to advance their own interests abroad." Last year, "Russia and China had made distributing face masks and protective equipment to hard-hit countries a central tenet of diplomatic relations," and "now, both countries are seen adopting a transactional approach to the delivery of vaccines."

Iran Says Its COVIran Barakat Vaccine Is "100% Effective" Against UK Coronavirus Variant.

Bloomberg (2/17, Haghdoost, 3.57M) reports, "Iran says one of its Covid-19 vaccines," the COVIran Barakat vaccine, "has been found to give complete protection against the British variant of the virus in human trials." The shot, "which has completed the first phase of clinical trials, is '100% effective' against the highly contagious strain, the Tasnim news agency reported, citing Mohammad Mokhber, head of the state-run foundation overseeing production of domestic shots." Iranian "officials have said the vaccine should be approved for public use by the summer." A facility "with the capacity to produce up to 3 million COVIran vaccines per month will be opened in two weeks, with a planned expansion allowing for up to 15 million doses by June, Mokhber said."

India's Largest Healthcare Chain Expects Private COVID-19 Vaccine Market To Open Up Within Weeks.

Bloomberg (2/17, Kay, 3.57M) reports, "India's largest healthcare chain [Apollo Hospitals Enterprises] expects a private market for Covid-19 vaccines to open up across the country within weeks, a move that may boost current government efforts to inoculate 300 million people by August." The healthcare chain "is working with India's government to provide vaccines for front line workers at 27 centers as part of the nationwide vaccination drive." So far, "the operator has trained 6,000 people and designated 3,500 sites for an expansion of the inoculation campaign, according to Managing Director Suneeta Reddy."

South Africa Coronavirus Variant Associated With 16-Fold Increase In COVID-19 Cases In Zambia.

Bloomberg (2/17, 3.57M) reports, "A coronavirus variant first detected in South Africa was linked to a 16-fold increase in cases in neighboring Zambia within a month, showing it has the ability to spread more swiftly and efficiently than the original strain."

Namibia Will Roll Out AstraZeneca's COVID-19 Vaccine Despite South Africa Halting Distribution Amid New Coronavirus Variant.

Reuters (2/17, Nyaungwa) reports, "Namibia will push ahead with the roll-out of the AstraZeneca vaccine despite neighbouring South Africa halting distribution after concerns over its effectiveness against a new variant, the government said on Wednesday."

COVAX-Participating Countries Will Soon Receive Information On First COVID-19 Vaccine Shipments, PAHO Says.

Reuters (2/17, Garrison) reports, "Countries participating in the COVAX coronavirus vaccine distribution mechanism will soon receive confirmation of their first shipments but should expect them to be small due to limited global supplies, the director of the Pan American Health Organization said on Wednesday." Roughly "160 million doses would be distributed in the region in the first six months with doses ramping up monthly, Etienne said, adding that a global squeeze on supplies meant initial shipments would be limited."

Sao Paulo's Serrana Selected For Population-Wide COVID-19 Vaccination Study.

The AP (2/17, Jeantet, Pollastri) reports that Sao Paulo's state government has selected Serrana to test city-wide vaccination against COVID-19, with plans to administer "shots over eight weeks to the entire population aged 18 and up – 30,000 people." The vaccination "study, known as Project S, entails follow-ups with each participant to shed light on the extent to which vaccination with the CoronaVac shot reduces spread of the virus."

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Pearson, Magalhaes, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) also reports.

Toronto Health Officials Want Ontario Government To Extend Lockdown.

The AP (2/17, Gillies) reports that Toronto "asked the Ontario provincial government on Wednesday to extend a lockdown order to at least March 9." Although "restrictions placed on Toronto by Ontario's government are currently scheduled to be removed on Feb 22...Dr. Eileen de Villa, Toronto's medical officer of health, said she has never been more worried about the future because of new coronavirus variants." As such, "she has written the province's top health official to request the lockdown last at least two weeks longer."

Mexico Pleads For Countries To Stop Hoarding COVID-19 Vaccines.

Reuters (2/17, Angulo) reports, "Mexico on Wednesday made a plea at the U.N. Security Council for countries to stop hoarding vaccines against COVID-19 as poorer ones fall behind in the race to vaccinate their citizens."

Public Outcry Continues In Peru Over Secret COVID-19 Vaccinations Among Wealthy.

The AP (2/17, Briceño) reports, "Public indignation over secret coronavirus vaccinations for the wealthy and well-connected in Peru grew Wednesday, a day after the Vatican's ambassador to the

South American nation admitted he was inoculated ahead of health care workers and the poor." The secretive "vaccination of nearly 500 people, including a then-president, his wife and brother, has roused anger over inequality in a country that has been badly battered by the pandemic, which has taken the lives of at least 310 doctors." Underscoring the anger, "doctors and nurses in an impoverished neighborhood in the capital of Lima on Wednesday protested the secret vaccination effort and hung signs from the windows of a hospital's intensive care unit that read, 'Getting a vaccine is our right.'"

The Washington Post (2/17, Tegel, 10.52M) also reports.

Most Countries In Europe Ignoring Mentally Ill In COVID-19 Vaccine Plans, Groups Say.

Reuters (2/17) reports, "Most European countries are ignoring mentally ill patients in their COVID-19 vaccine strategies despite such patients being highly vulnerable to contracting and dying from the disease, the leading mental health organisations warned on Wednesday." Out of 20 countries in Europe "surveyed for a study, only the Netherlands, Britain, Germany and Denmark were found to recognise severe mental illness as a high-risk medical condition and to have made specific provisions for vaccinating patients."

New COVID-19 Infections In England Fall Significantly In Recent Weeks.

Bloomberg (2/18, Mayes, 3.57M) reports that new COVID-19 "infections in England have fallen "significantly" in recent weeks, a boost to U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson as he weighs how quickly to re-open Britain's economy." Specifically, "national prevalence of the virus was down by two-thirds in the first half of February compared to January, according to a survey by Imperial College London and Ipsos Mori, one of the country's largest coronavirus studies." Overall, "the number of infected people fell to 51 per 10,000 at the time of the latest survey in February, down from 157 per 10,000 in January."

People In Brazil Getting COVID-19 Vaccines Illicitly, Then Bragging About It On Social Media.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Pearson, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that politicians, influential business owners and lawyers, along with other professionals in Brazil are illicitly getting COVID-19 vaccinations and then boasting about it on social media, prompting law enforcement to open investigations.

Federal Mask Mandate "Comes Far Too Late," Contributor Says.

In a piece for Forbes (2/17, Haseltine, 10.33M), contributor William A. Haseltine writes, "As part of the Biden administration's plan to combat Covid-19, an executive order was released on January 20th 'with the goal of maximizing public compliance with, and addressing any obstacles to, mask-wearing and other public health best practices identified by CDC.'" According to Haseltine, "The federal mask mandate is a step in the right direction but one that comes far too late, with the virus already having taken nearly half a million American lives."

Federal Agents Have Seized More Than 10M Fake N95 Masks In Recent Weeks.

The AP (2/17, Long) reports, "Federal agents have seized more than 10 million fake 3M brand N95 masks in recent weeks, the result of an ongoing investigation into counterfeits sold in at least five states to hospitals, medical facilities and government agencies." According to the AP, "3M, based in Maplewood, Minnesota, is among the largest global producers of the N95 mask, which has been approved by the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health." Throughout "the pandemic Homeland Security Investigations has used its 7,000 agents, along with border officials, the Food and Drug Administration and the FBI, to investigate the scams, seizing $33 million in phony products and arresting more than 200 people."

Also reporting are Fox News (2/17, Farber, 23.99M), The Hill (2/17, 5.69M), ABC World News Tonight (2/17, story 5, 2:15, Muir, 7.78M), CBS Evening News (2/17, story 6, 1:50, O'Donnell, 4.82M), and the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Hayashi, Subscription Publication, 8.41M).

COVID-19 Vaccines Have Potential To "Decimate" Demand For Testing.

Bloomberg (2/17, Court, 3.57M) reports COVID-19 testing companies "saw their stocks surge as Covid-19 testing became a key line of defense against the pathogen that's killed almost half a million Americans." However, "vaccines have the potential to decimate demand for diagnostics."

Opinion: Pandemic Has Made The Goal Of Individualized Education Easier To Achieve.

In an opinion piece for USA Today (2/17, Khan, Hooks, Contributors, 12.7M), Khan Academy founder and CEO Sal Khan and Stand Together CEO Brian Hooks ask, "What would it take to enable every student the opportunity for an education tailored to them – individualized education at a mass scale?" Hooks and Khan say, "Interestingly, the disruption caused by the pandemic has made this goal easier to achieve across the entire educational ecosystem." Khan and Hooks add, "Now is the time to build a better education system, one that empowers and uplifts every student at every stage of life. Achieving this goal requires the collaboration of educators, parents, philanthropists, businesses and policymakers alike who will focus on helping students receive a quality, individualized education no matter the setting."

Project Veritas Releases Video Of Mark Zuckerberg Raising Concerns COVID-19 Vaccines May Alter DNA.

The Washington Times (2/17, Richardson, 626K) reports, "Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has banned from his social media platforms any claims that the novel coronavirus vaccine alters DNA, although he himself expressed similar concerns last year." On Tuesday, Project Veritas released video "of Mr. Zuckerberg raising questions about whether vaccines include risks of side effects such as 'modifying people's DNA and RNA' in July during a virtual Q&A meeting with staff." The Times says, "Strictly speaking, Mr. Zuckerberg did not claim that the vaccine changes DNA, but in a Nov. 30 public livestream, he was still concerned enough to raise the issue with White House coronavirus task force member Dr. Anthony Fauci." COVID-19 vaccinations "were the first mRNA vaccinations cleared by the Food and Drug Administration." In a post last reviewed November 24,

the CDC said, "mRNA from the vaccine never enters the nucleus of the cell and does not affect or interact with a person's DNA."

Many Americans Expect Coronavirus Disruptions To Last Into Second Half Of 2021, Poll Indicates.

The Hill (2/17, 5.69M) reports, "A majority of Americans expect coronavirus disruptions to linger into the second half of 2021, according to a Gallup poll released on Wednesday." This "survey found that 53 percent of adults expect disruptions due to COVID-19 to continue past the middle of 2021, up from 33 percent who said the same in mid-December."

Mental Health Providers Stretched Thin As Demand For Services Surges.

The New York Times (2/17, Caron, 20.6M) reports, "Since the first coronavirus case was confirmed in the United States more than a year ago, the number of people in need of mental health services has surged." However, "many say that they are languishing on waiting lists, making call after call only to be turned away, with affordable options tough to find," and "providers, who have long been in short supply, are stretched thin." The CDC, in August, "published a report which concluded that in late June, 40 percent of adults in the United States had been struggling with mental health or substance abuse issues, and rates of depression and anxiety had risen since 2019."

Fauci Says US Has Two Powerful Tools Against New Coronavirus Variants.

CNN International (2/18, Maxouris) reports CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said during a White House briefing that "the continued spread of variants that are more transmissible could jeopardize the progress we have made in the last month if we let our guard down," adding that lowering the number of cases will give "fewer opportunities for the variants to spread and fewer opportunities for new variants to emerge." However, "the US has two powerful tools that can help against its spread and move the country further out of the pandemic's tunnel, Dr. Anthony Fauci told CNN on Wednesday night." Fauci said, "The two ways that we can counter that is one, continue to do the kinds of public health interventions that we talk about all the time." He added, "So if we roll out the vaccine...and get as many people vaccinated as quickly as we possibly can while we maintain the public health measures, we should be in good stead."

Laura Ingraham Says Biden, Democrats Do Not Want America To Return To Pre-Pandemic "Normal."

Fox News (2/17, Creitz, 23.99M) reports, "It's becoming increasingly clear that Joe Biden and the Democrats do not want life to return to pre-coronavirus 'normal' in America ever again, Laura Ingraham argued Wednesday night." The host of "The Ingraham Angle" said that "'if you thought because of vaccines and acquired immunity you'd be free from masks and COVID concerns by spring or summer, you have another [thing] coming,' referring to Biden's statement Tuesday that he hopes 'by next Christmas,' the U.S. will be in a 'very different circumstance.'" Under the Biden Administration's "ever-shifting guidelines, Ingraham said, White House chief medical adviser Dr.

Anthony Fauci and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will always have an upcoming holiday or other 'superspreader' event to warn Americans about."

Ninety-Year-Old Woman Treks Six Miles Through Snow To Get COVID-19 Vaccine.

The New York Times (2/18, Fortin, 20.6M) reports, "To get her coronavirus vaccination last weekend, Frances H. Goldman, 90," brought "out her hiking poles, dusted off her snow boots and started out from her home in the Seattle neighborhood of View Ridge." At Seattle Children's Hospital, "about three miles and an hour from home, she got the jab. Then she bundled up again and walked back the way she had come." According to the article, "Ms. Goldman, who became eligible for a vaccine last month, had already tried everything she could think of to secure an appointment. She had made repeated phone calls and fruitless visits to the websites of local pharmacies, hospitals and government health departments."

Coronavirus Infections, Deaths Falling Worldwide.

Bloomberg (2/18, Sutherland, 3.57M) reports that "there are some encouraging signs as new global" coronavirus "infections fall sharply." New COVID-19 "cases for the week ended Feb. 14 were the lowest since October, at 2.7 million, according to data from Johns Hopkins University." That signifies "a 2.5% increase in total infections from the previous week, the weakest gain since the start of the pandemic and less than half the rate seen a month earlier." Furthermore, "daily fatalities have averaged less than 10,000 over the past five days, down from a peak of more than 18,000 in mid-January."

Africa Nears 100K COVID-19 Deaths.

Reuters (2/18, Winning, Cocks, Roelf) reports "Africa's total reported death toll from COVID-19 was approaching 100,000 on Thursday, a fraction of those reported on other continents but rising fast as a second wave of infections overwhelms hospitals." Africa's "reported deaths, at 99,800, compare favourably with North America, which has registered more than half a million, and Europe, which is approaching 900,000, a Reuters tally shows." However, fatalities "are rising sharply across Africa, driven by its southern region, especially economic powerhouse South Africa, which accounts for nearly half."

Canadian Researchers Urge Delay In Administering Second Dose Of Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine.

Reuters (2/18, Kalia, Shibu) reports, "Two Canada-based researchers on Wednesday urged governments to delay administering the second dose of Pfizer Inc's COVID-19 vaccine, which they said had an efficacy of 92.6% after the first dose, as it was not significantly beneficial in the short term." The researchers "said their findings were derived from Pfizer's documents submitted to the" US FDA. The researchers "cautioned that there may be uncertainty about the duration of protection with a single dose, but said that the administration of the second dose a month after the first provided 'little added benefit in the short term.'"

UK Planning First Human Challenge Study For COVID-19.

Bloomberg (2/18, Gale, 3.57M) reports, "The U.K. plans to deliberately infect dozens of healthy young adult volunteers in the coming weeks with SARS-CoV-2 to learn more about how the virus affects people and the effectiveness of experimental vaccines." This first human challenge study for COVID-19 "has been approved by the country's clinical trials ethics body and aims to start by mid-March." However, the article says "it throws up a number of questions, including the availability of reliable 'rescue treatments' in the event that participants develop a serious illness."

'Horrifying' Death Toll Prompts Calls To Prioritize Jabs For Disabled.

The Financial Times (2/17, Neville, Cocco, Subscription Publication, 1.48M) reports, "People with disabilities in England should be given priority for vaccination against Covid-19, according to leading charities, after..."

Opinion: Home-Delivery Of COVID-19 Vaccines To Seniors, People With Disabilities In Conflict With California's Goal Of Rapidly Increasing Inoculations.

Columnist George Skelton writes in the Los Angeles Times (2/18, 3.37M) that the Newsom Administration says it is going to home-deliver doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to people with disabilities and shut-in seniors, but its "follow-through on its ideas...hasn't always been that great." Skelton explains, "Home delivery of COVID-19 shots is a goal tucked into a contract awarded by the Newsom administration to Blue Shield of California for expanding and coordinating vaccinations throughout the state," and "Kaiser Permanente is expected to sign a separate contract with the state to operate a vaccination program for its 9 million California healthcare members while helping to inoculate 'hard-to-reach and disproportionately impacted populations,' according to an earlier letter of intent." He adds that the state's ambitious goal "of rapidly increasing inoculations seems in potential conflict with the concept of relatively slow home delivery."

Opinion: American Christians Must Stand Up To Globalism, Socialists With Phrase "Bite Me."

In an opinion in the Washington Times (2/18, 626K), columnist Cheryl K. Chumley writes that patriotic American Christians "need to learn the power of the phrase 'Bite me' – and then, apply it accordingly" if they "are serious about reeling back socialism and" bringing "back individual freedoms." Chumley adds, "When globalist-minded medical bureaucrats and Microsoft-slash-self-described-philanthropists like, respectively, Dr. Anthony Fauci and Bill Gates are given wide latitude to counsel and influence the president of the United States, members of Congress, officials with the World Health Organization and United Nations, and other leaders both foreign and domestic, and convince them into shutting down economies, schools, churches and individual freedoms, all in the name of a virus – patriotic Christians need to say, 'Bite me, Fauci.' Or, 'Bite me, Bill Gates.' Or, the short-cut version, 'Bite me, globalists.'"

Analysis: Pandemic Provides Opportunity For American Healthcare System To Be Fixed.

In an analysis, Politico (2/18, Kenen, 6.73M) says "the work needed to contain and recover from the coronavirus might – just might – create momentum to fix things before the next catastrophe, which will inevitably come in one form or another, perhaps before we've healed from this one." Fixing the country's health system "is hard – and highly politicized. Some changes can be swift; others will take money and time. But there may not be a better moment to get started." Politico adds that CDC Director "Rochelle Walensky has vowed to rebuild public confidence, after some agency policies were undermined or politicized by the Trump White House." Covered California Executive Director Peter Lee, former Surgeon General Jerome Adams, former CMS official Cara James, and Elinore McCance-Katz, who ran the Department of Health and Human Services' mental health agency in the Trump Administration, are mentioned.

Analysis Highlights Takeaways From COVID-19 Vaccine "Policy Hackathon."

In an analysis, Politico (2/18, Owermohle, 6.73M) says the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in the US has "already run into problems: States got off to a sluggish start in December amid fewer-than-expected doses and confusion over their allotments; the federal plan to prioritize health care workers and elderly populations broke down in practice; and news reports suggesting states were hoarding doses generated bad press." According to the piece, "POLITICO decided to convene a 'policy hackathon' – Zoom sessions in which we asked some of the sharpest public health experts from around the country to compare notes, identify emerging challenges and share the best ideas for making this complex vaccination effort work." Politico provides a summary of "their takeaways," and adds that "White House Covid-19 adviser Andy Slavitt recently urged states not to stockpile supply for second doses."

Don't 'Hector' Workers Over Vaccine, Warns Top US Business Group (CDC Mentioned).

The Financial Times (2/18, Kuchler, Subscription Publication, 1.48M) reports, "The head of one of America's largest business groups has warned US employers against 'hectoring' their workers into taking a Covid-19..."

Editorial: US COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Is More Effective Than It Might Seem.

The Los Angeles Times (2/18, 3.37M) says in an editorial that "it may seem at times that the high hopes for the COVID-19 vaccination rollout have fizzled since December." However, the editorial says, "step back for a moment and chew on this little factoid: In just two months, the U.S. has managed to administer 55 million shots – more than any other country – even during a chaotic time of plague and contentious presidential transition. ... The Biden administration promised it would work with vaccine makers to increase production of doses, and it has delivered."

HHS in the News

Biden Has Reportedly Selected Former Obama Official To Lead CMS.

The Washington Post (2/17, Diamond, Goldstein, 10.52M) reports that President Biden has "selected Chiquita Brooks-LaSure to lead the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, filling a major role in his health-care leadership team." The Post cites "four people who spoke on the condition of anonymity." According to the Post, Brooks-LaSure "served in the Obama administration as a senior CMS official who helped implement the Affordable Care Act's coverage expansion and insurance-market reforms. She also worked on Capitol Hill as a Democratic staff member for the House Ways and Means Committee, building ties with then-Rep. Xavier Becerra, Biden's choice to lead the Health and Human Services department."

The AP (2/17, Alonso-Zaldivar) reports that, if confirmed, "Brooks-LaSure would be the first Black woman to head CMS." According to the AP, "Brooks-LaSure has a long track record in government," most recently leading "the Biden transition's 'landing team' for the Department of Health and Human Services, laying the groundwork for the new administration." As CMS Administrator, "Brooks-LaSure will be expected to grow Obamacare enrollment" and "confront Medicare's long-term financial problems, aggravated by a decline in payroll tax collections because of COVID-related job losses."

STAT (2/17, Florko, Facher, 262K) reports that Brooks-LaSure would "inherit an agency dogged by countless controversies during the Trump administration," including a number of lawsuits, "most notably a Supreme Court case set to be argued in March challenging the agency's new policy of denying health coverage to unemployed Medicaid beneficiaries."

Politico (2/17, Cancryn, Luthi, Roubein, 6.73M) reports similarly that Brooks-LaSure, who "oversaw implementation of Obamacare, if confirmed will play a leading role in crafting Biden's plans to expand on the health care law – and unwind much of the Trump administration's efforts to minimize it."

Also reporting are CNN (2/17, Saenz, Luhby, 89.21M), Fox Business (2/17, Lea, 3.06M), Reuters (2/17) and FierceHealthcare (2/17, King, 150K).

Biden Administration Announces Latest Round Of HHS Appointments.

Healthcare IT News (2/17, Jercich, 2K) reports, "The Biden administration this week announced the latest round of appointments to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services." According to the article, "some vacancies are still drawing attention," including "a permanent administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services." HHS Chief of Staff Sean McCluskie said in a statement, "As our country navigates an unprecedented public health crisis, President Biden is building a strong, experienced, and diverse team at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services." Some "hires listed on the HHS announcement had been previously reported," including "Dr. Rochelle Walensky as Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director." Max Lesko "will be Chief of Staff in the Office of the Surgeon General," and Sonia Chessen "will be the new Chief of Staff at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration."

Supreme Court Review Of Medicaid Work Rules Hinges On Verma Letters.

Bloomberg Law (2/17, Subscription Publication, 4K) reports that the "Trump administration's eleventh-hour attempt to preserve Medicaid work requirements and circumvent President Joe Biden's plan to rescind them hinges on the question of whether the effort amounted to guidance or binding contracts, legal analysts say." At issue "are letters former Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Administrator Seema Verma sent to states in January to keep Medicaid waivers in effect for nine months after any government movement to rescind them." Verma's move "is seen as an attempt to keep the work requirements alive until the Supreme Court can rule on their validity in a case it will hear in March."

Biden Administration Appears To Withdraw Final Rule On Prior Authorization.

FierceHealthcare (2/17, King, 150K) reports that the Biden Administration "appears to have withdrawn a rule finalized last minute by the Trump administration that aims to streamline prior authorization, a major source of provider administrative burden." CMS "released the final rule Jan. 15, touting it as an easy way for patients to get their healthcare data." CMS "did not say why the rule appeared to be withdrawn."

HHS Needs To Overhaul Value-Based Payment Approach, Report Says.

Modern Healthcare (2/17, Brady, Subscription Publication, 215K) reports, "HHS needs to overhaul its approach to value-based payment to ensure widespread practice transformation and rein in Medicare spending, according to a report by the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics at the University of Pennsylvania released Wednesday." Experts have "said the agency needs a new strategy because providers and payers have been too slow to adopt value-based payment, especially arrangements that require providers to take on significant financial risk. In addition, most existing initiatives don't systematically lower healthcare spending or improve quality."

SolarWinds Cyber-Attack Executed From Within US, White House Official Says.

Bloomberg (2/17, Sebenius, Leonard, 3.57M) reports, "A sprawling cyber-attack that compromised popular software created by Texas-based SolarWinds Corp. was executed from within the U.S., a top White House official said, though the government believes Russia was responsible." Wednesday, in a briefing for reporters, Deputy National Security Advisor Anne Neuberger said that "the federal investigation of the hack will take several months."

The Washington Examiner (2/17, Dunleavy, 888K) reports, "It is believed that the Justice Department, State Department, Treasury Department, Energy Department, Commerce Department, National Institutes of Health, and federal court system were affected by the hack."

Fauci Wins Dan David Prize In "Present" Category Of Public Health.

Genetic Engineering & Biotechnology News (2/17, 189K) reports, "Anthony S. Fauci, MD, director of the NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), has won one of this year's three $1 million Dan David Prizes, awarded to individuals and organizations deemed to be 'globally inspiring.'" Fauci is "the winner of the 'Present' category of Public Health." Another winner

of a Dan David Prize was "Steven Rosenberg, MD, PhD, chief surgery branch senior investigator head, tumor immunology section of the National Cancer Institute."

OncLive (2/17) also reports.

Fauci Lauds Maurice Hilleman, Vaccine Research Pioneer.

The Billings (MT) Gazette (2/17, Chaney, 179K) reports, "Although he won't be personally in Missoula for his lecture on Wednesday, Dr. Anthony Fauci's Montana ties run much thicker than a Zoom call." The country's "top adviser on the COVID-19 pandemic response and director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases since 1984 was also close friends with one of the pioneers in vaccine research at Hamilton's Rocky Mountain Laboratory, Maurice Hilleman." Speaking of Hilleman in an interview with Missoulian Tuesday, Fauci said, "He's one of the most underappreciated scientific assets this country ever had."

NIH All Of Us Research Program Starting To Get Genetic Results Back To Participants.

The Birmingham (AL) Times (2/18, 107K) reports the NIH's "All of Us Research Program has begun to return genetic results to participants who have donated biosamples for research," which "reflects the program's priority to give back information to its research volunteers." The program "is working to build a diverse community of 1 million or more participant partners across the U.S. to help researchers learn more about how genetics, environment and lifestyle factors affect health outcomes."

Face Masks May Serve As Humidifier, Contributor Says.

In a piece for Forbes (2/17, 10.33M), senior contributor Bruce Y. Lee writes, "A face covering may be able to block at least some of the Covid-19 coronavirus from going into your nose and mouth." In addition, Lee says, "A study just published in the Biophysical Journal showed how a face covering may serve as a humidifier." The study was conducted by researchers Joseph M. Courtney and Ad Bax, PhD, from the National Institutes of Health.

Opinion: President Biden Should Create National Institute For Food, Nutrition And Disease Prevention.

In an opinion piece for The Hill (2/17, 5.69M), International Journal of Disease Reversal and Prevention associate editor Casey Means, M.D., and corporate strategy consultant Grady Means write, "It's time for President Biden to create a National Institute for Food, Nutrition and Disease Prevention within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and make it the central scientific voice on nutrition within the government." According to Means and Means, "The largely preventable epidemics of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, stroke and cancer are not only growing, they are also creating hundreds of billions of dollars in excess American health care costs." Means and Means say, "And yet, in December, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), supported by the Department of Health and Human Services, endorsed high sugar levels in the '2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.'"

Woodcock Refutes Idea Of Establishing Firewall Between FDA, Drug Companies For Approvals.

Endpoints News (2/17, Gelman) reports that acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock refuted the idea of a firewall between regulators and drugmakers to "prevent lousy drugs from getting the agency's backing." She said, "The firewall you propose would significantly reduce the efficiency of FDA's review process and cause delays in drug development. ... Nor is a firewall necessary to ensure the integrity of FDA's decision-making."

More Than 150 Democratic Congressmen Urge Court To Lift FDA's Restrictions On Prescribing Mifepristone.

Inside Health Policy (2/17, Wang, Subscription Publication) reports 157 "Democratic members of Congress and 23 attorneys general are backing plaintiffs in an appeals case that seeks to prevent FDA from enforcing in-person prescribing restrictions for the abortion medication mifepristone." The lawmakers contend the agency's restrictions go against the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act and exacerbate health disparities.

FDA Leaders Say Agency Made Mistake In Allowing COVID-19 Antibody Tests To Be Sold, Shipped Without Being Reviewed.

Medical Device and Diagnostic Industry (2/17, Ford, 147K) reports FDA Center for Devices and Radiological Health Director Jeffrey Shuren, MD, and FDA Office of In Vitro Diagnostics and Radiological Health Director Timothy Stenzel, MD, PhD, wrote in an editorial in the New England Journal of Medicine that the FDA's decision to allow many COVID-19 antibody tests to be sold and shipped without review was a mistake. Shuren and Stenzel said, "We planned to revisit this policy after authorizing several serology tests. ... In hindsight, however, we realized that the policy outlined in our March 16 guidance was flawed." They added, "Knowing what we know now, we would not have permitted serology tests to be marketed without FDA review and authorization, even within the limits we initially imposed."

Opioid Crisis

Arizona Senate Panel Approves Measure To Legalize Test Strips To Detect Fentanyl.

The AP (2/17) reports that an Arizona Senate committee "has unanimously approved a measure that would legalize the use of test strips that can detect the presence of the potent opiate fentanyl." The measure "by Democratic Sen. Christine Marsh was prompted by the death of her 25-year-old son, Landon Marsh, last year." The Senate Health and Human Services committee "approved SB1486on Wednesday, and it now goes to the full Senate for consideration."

Health Care & Insurance Reform

Democratic Senators Unveil Public Option Healthcare Plan.

The Hill (2/17, Hellmann, 5.69M) reports that two Democratic senators "released their version of a public option health care plan Wednesday, setting the stage for this year's debate over how best to expand coverage to the millions of people who are uninsured." The proposal from Sens. Michael Bennet (CO) and Tim Kaine (VA) "would create a government-run health care plan on the Affordable Care Act (ACA) exchanges to compete with plans offered by private insurers with the hope of driving down costs." Democrats' "razor-thin majority in the Senate could complicate any major health care reform, though Kaine said he will push for the proposal to be passed via reconciliation, which avoids the filibuster and requires only 51 votes."

Modern Healthcare (2/17, Tepper, Subscription Publication, 215K) also reports.

CBO: Dems' Plan To Temporarily Expand Health Coverage Is Expensive.

Axios (2/17, Baker, 1.26M) reports that the Congressional Budget Office "doesn't expect much from House Democrats' plan to temporarily expand health care coverage through the Affordable Care Act." According to CBO's estimates, "Democrats' proposals would cover fewer than 2 million uninsured Americans – at a cumulative cost of over $50 billion." Democrats on the House Ways and Means Committee "want to make more people eligible for the ACA's premium subsidies and increase the value of those subsidies for people who already get them. Both changes would be temporary."

Insurer Participation In ACA Has Grown, Fueled By Pandemic And New President, Analysis Shows.

MedCity News (2/17, Vaidya) reports that an increase in "insurer participation in the Affordable Care Act individual marketplace indicates that payers are anticipating a fruitful year ahead." The "installation of a new president and ongoing Covid-19 pandemic appear to be driving this trend." Over the past year, "insurer participation in the ACA individual marketplace has grown and benchmark premiums have declined, according to a new analysis by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation."

US Government To Spend $50M To Boost Awareness Of ACA Enrollment Extension.

Medical Marketing & Media (2/17, Bushak) reports, "The option for people to choose a health insurance plan through the Affordable Care Act returned as of February 15, as part of an extended enrollment period put into place by the Biden administration." But "because the extension is happening outside the regular enrollment period – which ended December 15 – getting the word out in a big way will be crucial to its success." To that end, the federal government "plans to spend $50 million on outreach and communication to boost awareness in the 36 states that participate in ACA markets."

Wisconsin Governor's Budget Proposal Would Create State Health Insurance Marketplace, Public Option.

The Wisconsin State Journal (2/17, Wahlberg, 355K) reports that Wisconsin "would create a state-based health insurance marketplace and a public option plan in which people likely could buy into

BadgerCare, the state's main Medicaid program, under Gov. Tony Evers' proposed budget." The moves "could save the state money and provide insurance for many who might lose coverage if the Affordable Care Act is struck down, the governor's office said." Twenty-one states "have state-based marketplaces and at least two – Colorado and Washington – are known to be pursuing public option programs."

Opinion: Without Sweeping Legislation, Congress Can Still Move US Closer To Universal Healthcare.

In an opinion piece for The Hill (2/17, 5.69M), DePaul University law professor Wendy Netter Epstein writes, "Fewer people likely would have died from COVID-19 if everyone in the United States had access to health care. But a system of universal health care coverage is not coming to this country any time soon. The public option, a Medicare-style plan that people could choose to buy into that has been the centerpiece of President Biden's health care plan, is not likely either." Epstein argues, "Even without sweeping change, Congress can move the United States closer to the ultimate goal of universal and affordable health coverage. As close to 1 million Americans continue to contract COVID-19 every day, change that results in more people having access to health care will save lives in the weeks and months ahead."

South Carolina House Advances Bill That Would Ban Most Abortions.

The Hill (2/17, Coleman, 5.69M) reports, "The South Carolina state House advanced a bill that would ban most abortions if the heartbeat of the fetus can be detected, sending the legislation to the governor for his signature." This legislation "intends to mandate that doctors conduct an ultrasound before performing an abortion to see if a heartbeat can be detected."

HuffPost (2/17, O'Connor, 363K) also reports.

Health Information Technology

Healthcare Data Breaches Rose Over 55% In 2020, Report Says.

MedCity News (2/17, Vaidya) reports "data breaches in healthcare are becoming more common – and more expensive." In 2020, "healthcare data breaches totaled 599, up 55.1% from 2019, according to a new report from cloud security company Bitglass." The data "breaches affected more than 26 million people."

Human Services News

Access To COVID-19 Vaccines For People With Developmental Disabilities Varies By State, County.

Disability Scoop (2/18, Diament) reports "people with developmental disabilities are at significantly greater risk of dying from COVID-19, but whether or not individuals have access to vaccines is coming down to which state – or even which county – they live in." When the CDC "failed to specify those with developmental disabilities in its recommendations for priority groups, advocates were left to plead their case with individual states." Therefore, "in some places like

Tennessee, vaccines were made available in the highest priority group to all adults with developmental disabilities who are unable to live independently." But, "states like California and North Carolina moved people with disabilities down on their priority lists in favor of other groups, leaving advocates to fight to regain quicker access."

Medicare

Federal Appeals Court Rejects Lawsuit Against Medicare Part B Payments Cut.

FierceHealthcare (2/17, King, 150K) reports that a federal appeals court "has struck down the Community Oncology Alliance's lawsuit to get rid of a 2% cut to Medicare Part B payments installed via sequestration." The US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia "issued a ruling on Tuesday that federal courts did not have jurisdiction to consider the lawsuit from the group, which represents oncology practices, that was filed in 2018." The ruling "said that the claims made by the lawsuit arise under the federal law that created the Medicare program and that federal law prohibits the district court from deciding on whether the alliance's lawsuit had jurisdiction."

Medicaid & CHIP

Pandemic Gives Biden Unexpected Opening To Cut Deals With Red States On Medicaid.

Kaiser Health News (2/17, Levey) reports that President Biden "has an unexpected opening to cut deals with red states to expand Medicaid, raising the prospect that the new administration could extend health protections to millions of uninsured Americans and reach a goal that has eluded Democrats for a decade." The opportunity "emerges as the covid-19 pandemic saps state budgets and strains safety nets." That "may help break the Medicaid deadlock in some of the 12 states that have rejected federal funding made available by the Affordable Care Act, health officials, patient advocates and political observers say." Medicaid, "the half-century-old health insurance program for the poor and people with disabilities, and the related Children's Health Insurance Program cover more than 70 million Americans, including nearly half the nation's children."

Nearly 70% Of Alabamians Support Expanding Medicaid In State.

Alabama Live (2/17, Yurkanin, 497K) reports that most Alabama voters "now support expanding Medicaid to cover low-income adults under the Affordable Care Act, including 50.6 percent of Republicans, according to a poll released Wednesday by Cover Alabama." Cover Alabama "is a coalition of 90 organizations that support Medicaid expansion." The poll "included 700 likely 2022 voters, and 69 percent said they strongly or somewhat supported expansion."

Column: Biden Administration Tosses Medicaid Work Requirements On Policy Trash Heap.

In a column for the Los Angeles Times (2/17, 3.37M), Michael Hiltzik writes, "If there is a single policy that symbolizes the Trumpian/conservative approach to healthcare, it's the imposition of work requirements on Medicaid recipients. Healthcare experts warned from the inception that work requirements would throw thousands of people off Medicaid, wouldn't increase employment, would be expensive to administer, would probably be ruled illegal and were unnecessary. They

were right on all counts." Hiltzik writes, "As one of its first healthcare initiatives, the Biden administration has consigned work requirements to the trash heap."

Health & Medical News

Inspector General Report Says HUD Has Neglected To Enforce Environmental Regulations, Potentially Jeopardizing Health Of Thousands.

The Washington Post (2/17, Jan, 10.52M) reports, "The Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD] has for years neglected to enforce its own environmental regulations, resulting in lead poisoning of children in at least one public housing development and potentially jeopardizing residents' health in thousands of other federally subsidized apartments near contaminated sites, according to an inspector general report obtained by The Washington Post." According to the Post, "the West Calumet Housing Complex was declared a Superfund site in 2009 and demolished in 2019, its 1,100 mostly Black and Hispanic residents relocated." A 1998 investigation by HHS "revealed that 30 percent of children under 6 years old in the West Calumet community exhibited elevated blood lead levels. Lead can damage the developing brain."

Flu Season Has Been Virtually Nonexistent.

The New York Post (2/17, Eustachewich, 7.45M) reports, "The flu season has been virtually nonexistent this season – the lowest rate of hospitalization ever since that data has been tallied." Only "165 flu-related hospitalizations were recorded between Oct. 1 and Feb. 6, according to recent information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention," which is "compared to roughly 400,000 people who were hospitalized during the 2019-2020 flu season."

Former Theranos Official To Testify That Company's Leaders Rejected Idea That Blood-Testing Technology Was Not Accurate Enough.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Randazzo, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports Kingshuk Das, who was the laboratory director for Theranos in the blood-testing startup's final years, will testify during the founder's criminal trial that the company's leaders rejected Das' belief that the startup's technology was not accurate enough for use.

If Woman Has Heart Health Factors While Pregnant, Her Child May Have Poor Heart Health Years Later, Study Suggests.

The Chicago Tribune (2/17, Bowen, 2.03M) reports, "If a woman has heart health factors, such as obesity and smoking while pregnant, her child might end up a decade later with poor heart health, according to a new study from Northwestern Medicine and the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago." The study "researchers found that among moms who had more than two heart health factors – like obesity, smoking, high blood pressure or cholesterol – their children were nearly eight times more likely to have poor heart health, monitoring factors in the kids like blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose." The findings were published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. According to the Tribune, "The Surgeon General's plan to improve maternal health noted that heart disease is a leading cause of death during pregnancy. "

Airlines Ban Emotional-Support Animals, But Trained Service Dogs Can Fly For Free.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, McCartney, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that although airlines have banned emotional-support animals from flying in their cabins, trained service dogs may fly for free, without cages.

Gates Foundation, Novartis Join Forces To Develop Gene Therapy To Cure Sickle Cell Disease.

STAT (2/17, Cooney, 262K) reports, "Novartis and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are joining forces to discover and develop a gene therapy to cure sickle cell disease with a one-step, one-time treatment that is affordable and simple enough to treat patients anywhere in the world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where resources may be scarce but disease prevalence is high." In October 2019, NIH and the Gates Foundation "said together they would invest at least $200 million over the next four years to develop gene-based cures for sickle cell disease and HIV that would be affordable and available in the resource-poor countries hit hardest by the two diseases, particularly in Africa." David Williams, chief of hematology/oncology at Boston Children's Hospital, is "working with the Gates Foundation, as well as the Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research at MIT, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, and Massachusetts General Hospital, on another approach in which a single injection of a reagent changes the DNA of blood stem cells."

STAT Profiles Truveta Which Aims To Sell De-Identified Medical Data To Answer Questions.

STAT (2/17, Ross, 262K) reports on "Truveta, a company formed by 14 U.S. health systems to aggregate and sell de-identified data on millions of American patients to help answer some of medicine's most pressing questions." The company is led by former Microsoft software engineer Terry Myerson who "led the development of products such as Xbox and Surface."

Bluebird Bio Suspends Operations Of Gene Therapy For Sickle Cell Disease After Two More Cancer Diagnoses.

STAT (2/17, Feuerstein, 262K) reports Bluebird Bio announced that two more people "being treated with its gene therapy for sickle cell disease had been diagnosed with cancer," which "has forced the company to suspend operations and raised fears of a broader impact across the gene therapy field." STAT adds, "The cases follow an earlier cancer diagnosis in December 2018, and are refocusing attention on whether there is a causal link with the therapy."

Study Adds To Mounting Evidence That Synonymous Variants Can Have Consequences.

The Scientist (2/17, Zimmer, 157K) reports, "For decades, researchers have viewed synonymous mutations as inconsequential quirks of the genome." However, "like other historically underappreciated aspects of the genome, scientists are realizing that many 'silent' mutations might not be so silent after all." A study published "in iScience adds to the mounting evidence that synonymous variants can have consequences," as "the authors describe a synonymous mutation

in the gene BAP1 that was associated with a worse-than-expected prognosis in a kidney cancer patient."

Utah Bill Attempts To Undo Some Vaping Restrictions.

KTVX-TV Salt Lake City (2/17, Martin) reports, "The debate over vaping is ramping up this legislative session with a bill trying to undo some vaping restrictions in Utah." Over the past "few years, the state legislature has given the Utah Department of Health the power to limit nicotine sales and quantities in Utah; now a lawmaker wants to take that power back with S.B. 134."

Indian River County May Raise Legal Age To Buy Tobacco To 21.

TCPalm (FL) (2/17, Wixon, 273K) reports Indian River County may soon "raise the legal age to buy tobacco, including electronic cigarettes and vaping products, to 21." On Tuesday, county commissioners "said they want to consider changing the age from 18 to 21," although "chairman Peter O'Bryan requested an exemption for 18- to 20-year old members of the military."

Vermont Lawmakers Considering Ban On Sales Of Flavored Cigarettes, E-Cigarettes.

WVNY-TV Burlington, VT (2/17, Bates) reports the Vermont Legislature is considering "a bill to ban the sale of flavored cigarettes, e-cigs, and e-liquids."

WPTZ-TV Burlington, VT (2/17, Leighton, 63K) reports "a hearing on the bill was held on Wednesday in the Senate Health and Welfare Committee."

Arizona Lawmakers Considering Bill Allowing Women To Skip Trip To Physician's Office To Obtain Birth Control.

The Arizona Republic (2/17, Polletta, 1.05M) reports "the Arizona Legislature this year could make it easier for women to get birth control pills, patches and rings by letting them skip a trip to the doctor's office before heading to the pharmacy." A bill in the Senate "would allow a state Health Services Department physician to issue a standing prescription for certain hormonal contraceptives, meaning women 18 and older would not need to secure individual prescriptions on their own." Under the bill, "the system would work more like the standing order that lets Arizona pharmacists dispense emergency drugs for opioid overdoses."

GSK, Vir Biotechnology To Expand Partnership To Develop Therapies For Diseases Beyond COVID-19.

Reuters (2/17, Spalding) reports GlaxoSmithKline and Vir Biotechnology "will expand an existing partnership developing antibody therapies for COVID-19 to other diseases, the companies said on Wednesday." As "a part of the deal to research and develop monoclonal antibody treatments for influenza and other respiratory illnesses, GSK will make a further $120 million equity investment in Vir and an additional upfront payment of $225 million." The companies "announced a partnership last year to research COVID-19 treatments. Unlike vaccines, antibody treatments are designed to be given to patients who have been diagnosed with the illness, with the aim of decreasing the severity of the disease."

FierceBiotech (2/17, Adams, 4K) reports the companies' 2020 deal aimed "to develop an antibody against SARS-CoV-02, though the companies are behind in development terms compared to the likes of Eli Lilly and Regeneron, both of which have treatments that were given emergency clearance from the FDA in recent months."

Also reporting are Endpoints News (2/17, Mast), BioPharma Dive (2/17, Jensen), and MedCity News (2/17, Vinluan).

Opinion Offers Advice On Shifting The Drug Development Paradigm For Rare Diseases.

In an opinion piece for STAT (2/17, 262K), Sanath Kumar Ramesh, founder and CEO of the OpenTreatments Foundation; Max G. Bronstein, founder of the Journal of Science Policy & Governance and principal at MGB Consulting; and R. Jude Samulski, Chief Scientific Officer of the Columbus Children's Foundation, write, "In addition to the most visible effects of Covid-19 – tragic deaths, lingering illness, economic turmoil, and more – the pandemic is affecting much that is out of the spotlight. One is research on the so-called rare and ultra-rare diseases that affect an estimated 300 million people around the world." While treatments, including gene therapy and gene editing with CRISPR technology, are available, "more than 95% of rare diseases do not have a single FDA-approved treatment." The authors argue, "The world needs a drug development paradigm that serves all patients regardless of rarity."

FDA Recalls Lots Of Capsules Containing Undeclared Sildenafil, Tadalafil.

The Miami Herald (2/17, Neal, 647K) reports the US FDA has recalled "all lots of Adam's Secret Extra Strength 1500 and Adam's Secret Extra Strength 3000 capsules, sold at Adamssecret.co in 10-capsule boxes and blister foil sheets...as unapproved drugs." The recall notice said "an FDA laboratory analysis found the product to contain undeclared sildenafil and/or tadalafil," making the capsules "unapproved new drugs for which the safety and efficacy have not been established and therefore subject to recall."

North Carolina Man Pleads Guilty To Distributing Unapproved Drugs After Selling Fake Diet Pills.

The Raleigh (NC) News & Observer (2/17, Shaffer, 396K) reports former MedFixRX owner Brian Parks, 47, of North Carolina "will spend a year and a day in federal prison after his Cary-based company imported and sold drugs disguised as dietary supplements for building muscle mass." Parks "pleaded guilty in November to one count of distributing unapproved new drugs with the intent to mislead and defraud consumers and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration."

San Francisco Biotechnology Firm Lands Two Big Deals For Cancer-Fighting Drug.

The San Francisco Business Times (2/17, Leuty, Subscription Publication, 895K) reports, "A cancer-fighting drug already at the center of multiple late-stage clinical trials with a Big Pharma company is headlining two more deals involving San Francisco-based Nektar Therapeutics Inc." Both deals "center on a trial of bempegaldesleukin – also known simply as 'bempeg' or NKTR-214 – in combination with Merck & Co.'s Keytruda against types of head and neck cancer." The deal

"with Merck itself is a more traditional agreement where Nektar sponsors the study and Merck supplies Keytruda and other help; the other, with Pleasanton's SFJ Pharmaceuticals, gives Nektar up to $150 million to complete a study but with Nektar making annual milestone payments back to SFJ over seven to eight years."

SpyBiotech Raises $32.5M For Its Vaccine Technology.

Endpoints News (2/17, Gelman) reports, "Roughly five months after partnering with the Serum Institute of India to develop Covid-19 vaccines, SpyBiotech is ready for its next big thing." The British biotech "pulled in a $32.5 million Series A round last week, funneling the success of its collaboration into a venture-capital raise." SpyBiotech "is planning to develop its VLP vaccine platform with the cash, but CEO Sumi Biswas told Endpoints News that could go in any number of directions."

Global Health

Air Pollution Led To Tens Of Thousands Of Fatalities In World's Five Most Populous Cities In 2020, Researchers Say.

Reuters (2/17, Taylor) reports "air pollution caused tens of thousands of deaths in the world's five most populous cities last year despite coronavirus lockdowns, researchers said on Thursday, urging governments to ditch fossil fuels and invest in a green recovery." In the world's "five most-populated cities – Delhi, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Shanghai and Tokyo – air pollution caused about 160,000 deaths and economic losses [totaling] about $85 billion." Delhi had the largest "death toll among the five biggest cities, with some 54,000 deaths – or one per 500 people – due to high levels of tiny pollution particles, known as PM2.5, which can cause lung and heart diseases, the study said."

National News

Biden Visiting Swing States To Push COVID Relief Plan.

TIME (2/17, Abramson, Bennett, 18.1M) reports President Biden is leaving Washington "to pitch his $1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package to voters in key swing states." Biden had been scheduled to "spend Thursday in Kalamazoo, Michigan, touring a Pfizer vaccine production facility and meeting with workers," though the trip was postponed due to inclement weather. By "selecting two of the most critical battleground states, he's using his political capital to tell the voters that helped send him to the White House how he's delivering on his campaign pledges – and why they should stick with Democrats in elections to come. ... But first and foremost, Biden is hoping to cement bipartisan support for his relief bill."

Meanwhile, Bloomberg (2/17, Fabian, 3.57M) reports Vice President Harris will hold a virtual meeting Thursday "with a group of female Democratic lawmakers and advocacy groups...as part of the White House's push to build support" for its relief bill. The meeting, which will include Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Chairwoman Patty Murray, House Appropriations Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro, Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), and Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA),

"will focus on the economic struggles women have faced as a result of the pandemic and how President Joe Biden's proposal would address them, according to Harris's office." Bloomberg adds, "The groups participating in the Thursday meeting with Harris are mostly left-leaning. Service Employees International Union President Mary Kay Henry and Tina Tchen, CEO of the anti-sexual harassment group Time's UP, are expected to join, as are nine other leaders of organizations representing Black women, Native Americans, mothers and female business owners."

White House Office of Public Engagement Director Cedric Richmond said on MSNBC (2/17, 1.89M), "We think this plan is going to get passed. A lot of it is going to be because of the hard work that the President and Vice President put in, in articulating the need for this plan to members of Congress, but also because the public is so vocal about the need for it and the fact that we need it right now, we shouldn't wait, we shouldn't delay. And I think that is having a big effect. The public support for it will help us get it through."

E.J. Dionne writes in the Washington Post (2/17, 10.52M) that Biden and Democrats are "no longer scared. They're not defensive, or constantly looking over their shoulders, or making preemptive concessions to Republicans." Dionne adds while Republicans "will probably swing some of their supporters away from Biden's economic plan," Biden and Democrats "are operating with confidence because they have finally embraced what has long been true: Progressive economic policies are broadly popular." Most Americans "turn to the federal government to act boldly in a time of crisis not because they love government in the abstract but because they understand it as the only entity capable of taking on certain large tasks. That's why Biden is confident about the course he's on – and it's why he shouldn't back down."

Local Officials From Both Parties Seek COVID Relief. The AP (2/17, Barrow) reports the coronavirus has impacted city budgets, and mayors and local leaders of both parties have turned to Washington for help. President Biden's relief plan "would send about $350 billion to state, local and tribal governments, with about $140 billion of that set aside for cities and counties," but "Republicans in Washington have stood in the way of sending federal aid to cities, leaving local leaders and public employee unions worried they'll get shortchanged as Congress negotiates the next COVID-19 response package." The AP says the Republican position carries "political risks. In rejecting a bill with help for lower governments, Republican lawmakers may soon find themselves voting against high-profile allies and forcing those constituents to depend on President Joe Biden and his fellow Democrats."

WPost: Lawmakers Should Keep Bill Focused On COVID Relief. The Washington Post (2/17, 10.52M) argues in an editorial that more federal funding is needed "to cope with the ongoing damage done by the covid-19 pandemic, and Congress and President Biden should provide it on the widest bipartisan basis possible – and swiftly. That means setting aside legislative items not directly related to covid, despite lawmakers' inevitable temptation to take advantage of a crisis to advance other priorities." The Post says the current House bill "shows signs of losing focus in just that way" as the House Ways and Means Committee "has attached a plan to rescue financially troubled retirement systems known as multiemployer pensions." The Post argues that "this particular bit of sausage-making illustrates the complications that develop when lawmakers start to stray from straightforward attention to the most urgent covid-related needs."

WSJournal Says Relief Bill Includes $22B Tax On Multinational Companies. A Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) editorial says the COVID relief measure includes "a $22 billion tax increase on multinational companies." The Journal says it is "a sign of tax increases to come, as the Biden-Pelosi-Schumer Democrats scramble for revenue to finance their seemingly limitless expansions of government."

Psaki Says White House Would "Support A Study" Of Black Reparations.

The AP (2/17, Freking) reports the White House "is giving its support to studying reparations for Black Americans, boosting Democratic lawmakers who are renewing efforts to create a commission on the issue." White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Wednesday that President Biden "backs the idea of studying the issue...though she stopped short of saying he would sign the bill if it clears Congress." Politico (2/17, King, 6.73M) similarly says Psaki "stopp[ed] short of full-throated backing for the bill." Psaki said, "It's working its way through Congress. We'd certainly support a study, but we'll see what happens through the legislative process."

USA Today (2/17, Yancey-Bragg, 12.7M) reports the bill under consideration "would direct more than a dozen experts to examine how the U.S. government supported slavery from 1619 to 1865 and created laws that discriminated against formerly enslaved people and their descendants. The commission could recommend remedies, including compensation and education of the American public on the legacy of slavery."

USA Today Analysis: Expected Retirements Will Give Biden Chances To Put Black Women On Federal Bench.

USA Today (2/17, Fritze, 12.7M) reports, "An expected wave of retiring judges will give President Joe Biden a chance to address a startling lack of diversity on the federal bench, advocates say, a shift that eventually could have implications for future nominees to the Supreme Court." The President "repeatedly promised" during the 2020 campaign "to name a Black woman to the nation's highest court for the first time in history if a seat opens on his watch. But that commitment has drawn attention to a lack of Black women on U.S. appeals courts – the pool from which Supreme Court justices usually are drawn." There are just four Black female appeals court judges "out of 179 judgeships – all of them older than 65."

Durbin Expected To Continue GOP Policy On Judicial Nomination Blue Slips. Politico (2/17, LeVine, 6.73M) reports Senate Democrats "are planning to continue the GOP's approach to giving home-state senators veto power over lower court nominees – while granting freer rein to [Biden's] circuit court nominees." Senate Judiciary Chairman Richard Durbin's expected approach "would make no change to the so-called 'blue slip' process that Republicans changed in 2017 to yank home-state senators' power" to block then-President Donald Trump's circuit court picks.

Milley And Esper Held Back Promotion Recommendations For Female Generals Until Trump Left Office.

The New York Times (2/17, Schmitt, Cooper, 20.6M) reports that last year, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley and then-Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Gen. Mark Milley "feared

that any candidates other than white men for jobs mostly held by white men might run into turmoil once their nominations got to the White House," and therefore held back recommendations on promotions for Air Force Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost and Army Lt. Gen. Laura Richardson until then-President Donald Trump had left office, "betting that" President Biden "would be more supportive."

Biden Using Twitter For "Policy, Not Personal Insults."

USA Today (2/17, Collins, 12.7M) looks at how President Biden uses social media under the headline "Policy, Not Personal Insults: Biden Uses Twitter To Sell His Agenda, With A Few Pooch Pics Thrown In." While former President Donald Trump "often used Twitter to hurl insults, settle scores and promote baseless conspiracy theories," Biden has so far "used the popular digital platform primarily to promote his policies and his political philosophy."

Senators Call On DeJoy To Address "Unacceptable Delays" In Mail Delivery.

Reuters (2/17) reports 33 senators on Wednesday "urged Postmaster General Louis DeJoy to address continuing 'unacceptable delays' in mail deliveries and questioned if his decisions are continuing to hinder mail deliveries." DeJoy "suspended operational changes in August after he came in for enormous criticism from U.S. lawmakers over delays in deliveries."

Millions Remain Without Power As Another Major Winter Storm Looms.

All three broadcast networks once again led their evening newscasts with coverage of the major winter storm that has left millions without power in Texas and other parts of the South. David Muir said on ABC World News Tonight (2/17, lead story, 4:00, 7.78M) that "another major storm [is] bearing down from the South right up into the Northeast tomorrow...and this storm has already slammed Texas yet again – another night there with millions without power, without heat, without water." Texas officials are "acknowledging they do not know when the power will be back on."

Norah O'Donnell said on the CBS Evening News (2/17, lead story, 3:50, 4.82M) that "millions of Americans [were] heading into another night of brutal cold, without heat, power or clean water. ... So many pipes have now burst" that Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) "is asking for help from out-of-state plumbers. ... More than 2.5 million Texans still don't have electricity, and with the state's energy grid buckling under the demand, it could be days before power is restored." Lester Holt said on NBC Nightly News (2/17, lead story, 2:50, 6.24M), "These are desperate hours for millions in Texas, still left in the cold from a failing power grid. They are compounded by sub-freezing temperatures, [with] only vague assurances of when the lights may go back on for good."

The AP (2/17, Weber, Bleed) reports, "Millions of Americans endured another frigid day without electricity or heat in the aftermath of a deadly winter storm as utility crews raced to restore power before another blast of snow and ice sowed more chaos in places least equipped to deal with it. Nearly 3.4 million customers around the U.S. were still without electricity, and some also lost water service." USA Today (2/17, Rice, 12.7M) reports, "At least two dozen people have

died because of the intense cold and a series of storms that moved from coast to coast since the weekend."

The Washington Post (2/17, Sonmez, 10.52M) reports that on Wednesday, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said the Administration "is supplying emergency power generators to Texas and is prepared to move diesel to the state, where about 3 million people remain in the dark amid a barrage of winter storms that have overwhelmed the electric grid." Psaki said the White House and FEMA "remain in close contact with states across the affected area to ensure any federal support requirements are met."

The Dallas Morning News (2/17, 772K) reports Abbott "has ordered Texas natural gas producers to sell the fuel to in-state power generators, part of an effort to restore electricity to millions who have been shivering in dark homes. ... But he couldn't say for sure when and where Texans could expect out their electricity to be shut on or off." The New York Times (2/17, Romero, Dobbins, 20.6M) with Texas "reeling from a rare winter storm that caused widespread power outages, Democrats have mobilized public anger over the Republicans' oversight of the energy industry, opening a new front in their battle to erode the party's dominance of every statewide office and both chambers of the legislature."

The Washington Post (2/17, 10.52M) editorializes that the Texas "weather and power crisis continued to leave millions shivering across the state Wednesday even as the state's Republican leaders seemingly lied about the reasons for the disaster." The Post calls their blaming the blackouts "on the state's supposed overreliance" on wind power "nonsense," saying "the deep freeze shut down equipment across the state to supply and burn natural gas for electricity, just as demand for electric heating surged and as demand for natural gas for home heating spiked." The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), however, says in an editorial that it is incorrect to blame the power outages on natural gas, writing that freezing wind turbines necessitated a ramping up of gas and coal power.

Reuters (2/17, Nakamura), Bloomberg (2/17, Malik, Chediak, 3.57M), the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Ansari, Blunt, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), and the Los Angeles Times (2/17, 3.37M) are among the other sources covering the storms and the power grid issues.

Perry Says Power Outages Are Preferable To Federal Regulation. The Houston Chronicle (2/17, 982K) reports former Texas Gov. Rick Perry (R), who served as energy secretary under President Donald Trump, said Wednesday "that going days without power is a sacrifice Texans should be willing to make if it means keeping federal regulators out of the state's power grid." Perry said, "Texans would be without electricity for longer than three days to keep the federal government out of their business. Try not to let whatever the crisis of the day is take your eye off of having a resilient grid that keeps America safe personally, economically, and strategically."

Media Analyses: Trump-McConnell Feud Could Hurt GOP Prospects In 2022.

Several outlets look at the conflict between former President Donald Trump and Senate Minority Leader McConnell, arguing that the feud could impact GOP prospects in the 2022 midterm elections. The AP (2/17, Peoples, Colvin, Slodysko) says Trump "is escalating a political war within his own party that could undermine the Republican push to fight President Joe Biden's agenda and

ultimately return to power." Trump "continued to attack McConnell" on Wednesday, saying in an interview, "The Republicans are soft. They only hit their own, like Mitch." Politico (2/17, Arkin, Desiderio, Isenstadt, 6.73M) says Republicans "are starting their life in the Senate minority mired in a civil war over the future of the GOP and [Trump's] role in the party."

The New York Times (2/17, Hulse, Fandos, 20.6M) says McConnell has been drawn into "a vicious feud with the former president" and widened "Republican division that could spill into the midterm elections." Some Republicans say "the leader whose focus was always the next election had hurt the party's 2022 prospects." Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI), who has yet to decide whether he will seek reelection next year, said support for McConnell "was already emerging as a negative factor among Trump-backing Republican primary voters he speaks with back home."

The Washington Post (2/17, DeBonis, Dawsey, 10.52M) reports, "Multiple Republicans close to McConnell said he has little interest in carrying on a back-and-forth with the former president. Having said his piece about Trump's conduct after the election, McConnell has signaled he plans to focus his attention on opposing Democratic policies and ensuring the most electable Republicans emerge from Senate primaries next year." But it is unclear "just how far Trump will pursue his vendetta against McConnell."

Jamelle Bouie writes in the New York Times (2/17, 20.6M) that the fact that the backlash against the seven Republican senators who voted to convict Trump in his impeachment trial proves that there is "no truly meaningful anti-Trump opposition within the party. The civil war, such as it was, ended four-and-a-half years ago when Trump accepted the Republican nomination for president." Brian Klaas writes in the Washington Post (2/17, 10.52M), "Disqualifying, extremist behavior isn't just tolerated in the modern GOP – it's encouraged."

Barabak: Changing Times, "Talk Of Mental Decline" Drive Calls For Feinstein To Resign.

Mark Z. Barabak of the Los Angeles Times (2/17, 3.37M) writes under the headline "The Tragedy Of Dianne Feinstein" that California's senior senator, "deep into her ninth decade," is "no longer the politically revered figure she once was. There is talk of mental decline, of selfishly overstaying her time in office and calls for the Democrat to resign from the Senate for the good of her state and the country. The slow, sad fade is not simply a function of Feinstein's age – she is 87 – but also the fact that times and the political world have changed and Feinstein, whether unwilling or unable, has failed to change along with them." Barabak writes that while "today, Feinstein is a subject of scorn, considered by many a relic who is well past her prime...history, with its long view, is likely to be much kinder."

Democrat Lasry Enters Wisconsin Senate Race.

The AP (2/17, Bauer) reports, "Democrat Alex Lasry, a 33-year-old Milwaukee Bucks executive and son of a billionaire," entered the Wisconsin Senate race on Wednesday. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) has not yet said if he will seek reelection. The AP says the race "is expected to be one of the most hotly contested in the country with control of the Senate hanging in the balance." The Washington Post (2/17, Bonesteel, 10.52M) reports Lasry "served as an aide in the administration of former president Barack Obama and spearheaded Milwaukee's successful attempt to land the

2020 Democratic National Convention, which was significantly pared down because of the pandemic."

Limbaugh Dies At 70.

Conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh died Wednesday at age 70. All three broadcast networks aired lengthy reports, with Jonathan Karl saying on ABC World News Tonight (2/17, story 7, 2:40, Muir, 7.78M) that Limbaugh was "as wildly successful and influential as he was divisive and controversial," and called him "the godfather of the offend anyone, apologize to no one politics that got Donald Trump elected president." On the CBS Evening News (2/17, story 7, 1:50, O'Donnell, 4.82M), Jim Axelrod called Limbaugh "one of the loudest, most provocative voices on the national scene in the last three-plus decades." Geoff Bennett said on NBC Nightly News (2/17, story 9, 1:25, Holt, 6.24M) that his "self-titled show was the most listened to radio talk show in America."

The New York Times (2/17, A1, McFadden, Grynbaum, 20.6M) calls Limbaugh "the right-wing radio megastar whose slashing, divisive style of mockery and grievance reshaped American conservatism," while USA Today (2/17, Ali, 12.7M) calls him a "conservative radio talk titan." The Washington Post (2/17, Fisher, 10.52M) says Limbaugh "deployed comic bombast and relentless bashing of liberals, feminists and environmentalists to become the nation's most popular radio talk-show host and lead the Republican Party into a politics of anger and obstruction." In an editorial, the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says Limbaugh "was invaluable to the conservative movement in the 1990s" and "kept his sense of humor and rarely let anger drown his fundamental optimism about the United States. ... Limbaugh knew he was an entertainer, not an intellectual or politician, and he said so many times."

Former President Donald Trump spoke with Fox News' Hannity (2/17, 535K) about Limbaugh, saying, "Our country is a great place and we are going to make it even greater, as the expression goes. But we have a lot to talk about but today is all about Rush, don't you think?" The AP (2/17, Sedensky), Reuters (2/17, Dunham), the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Steele, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), the Los Angeles Times (2/17, 3.37M), Axios (2/17, 1.26M), Politico (2/17, Cohen, 6.73M), The Hill (2/17, 5.69M), and the CNN (2/17, Stelter, 89.21M) and Fox News (2/17, Flood, 23.99M) websites are among the sources covering Limbaugh's death.

Editorial Wrap-Up

Washington Post.

"Texas Republicans Lied About The Power Crisis. We Need More Investment In Renewables – Not Less." The Washington Post (2/17, 10.52M) editorializes that the Texas "weather and power crisis continued to leave millions shivering across the state Wednesday even as the state's Republican leaders seemingly lied about the reasons for the disaster." The Post calls their blaming the blackouts "on the state's supposed overreliance" on wind power "nonsense," saying "the deep freeze shut down equipment across the state to supply and burn natural gas for

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electricity, just as demand for electric heating surged and as demand for natural gas for home heating spiked."

"Biden Delivers A Snub To Israel's Netanyahu – And For Good Reason." The Washington Post (2/17, 10.52M) says if President Biden's delayed first phone call to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was a sign of Biden's displeasure, "the new president had some reason." Netanyahu "has a long history of allying himself with U.S. Republicans and of seeking to aid GOP presidential candidates." In addition, "in an apparent attempt to preempt likely policies of the Biden administration, Mr. Netanyahu approved hundreds of new housing units in the West Bank during the transition and delivered a speech rejecting Mr. Biden's plan to rejoin an international accord limiting Iran's nuclear program."

"Congress Needs To Focus Its Covid Relief Bill – On Covid Relief." The Washington Post (2/17, 10.52M) argues that more federal funding is needed "to cope with the ongoing damage done by the covid-19 pandemic, and Congress and President Biden should provide it on the widest bipartisan basis possible – and swiftly. That means setting aside legislative items not directly related to covid, despite lawmakers' inevitable temptation to take advantage of a crisis to advance other priorities." The Post says the current House bill "shows signs of losing focus in just that way" as the House Ways and Means Committee "has attached a plan to rescue financially troubled retirement systems known as multi-employer pensions." The Post argues that "this particular bit of sausage-making illustrates the complications that develop when lawmakers start to stray from straightforward attention to the most urgent covid-related needs."

Wall Street Journal.

"Texas Spins Into The Wind." The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says that it is incorrect to blame Texas' power outages on natural gas, writing that freezing wind turbines necessitated a ramping up of gas and coal power.

"Rush Limbaugh." The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh, who died Wednesday, "was invaluable to the conservative movement in the 1990s" and "kept his sense of humor and rarely let anger drown his fundamental optimism about the United States. ... Limbaugh knew he was an entertainer, not an intellectual or politician, and he said so many times."

"Emmanuel Macron And The Woke." The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) argues that French President Emmanuel Macron has used efforts to fight violent religious extremism to defend the core democratic values of freedom and equality within his country.

"A Covid Bill's Hidden Tax Increase." The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says the COVID relief measure includes "a $22 billion tax increase on multinational companies." The Journal says it is "a sign of tax increases to come, as the Biden-Pelosi-Schumer Democrats scramble for revenue to finance their seemingly limitless expansions of government."

The Big Picture

Headlines From Today's Front Pages.

Wall Street Journal:

US Retail Sales Rose Strongly On Stimulus In January
North Korea Turning To Cryptocurrency Schemes In Global Heists, US Says
Insiders At Covid-19 Vaccine Makers Sold Nearly $500 Million Of Stock Last Year
Europe Locked Its Economy In Place. Unlocking It Could Be Ugly.
'I'm Like A SPAC – What the Hell Is That?': Rap Explains Hot Finance Trend
Saudi Arabia Set To Raise Oil Output Amid Recovery In Prices

New York Times:

Desperate For Light And Warmth, Texans See No End For Winter Storm
No, Wind Farms Aren't The Main Cause Of The Texas Blackouts
Biden Signals He's Flexible On Immigration Overhaul
Rush Limbaugh Dies At 70; Turned Talk Radio Into A Right-Wing Attack Machine
Cuomo Faces Revolt As Legislators Move To Strip Him Of Pandemic Powers

Washington Post:

Polarizing Icon Of Conservative Radio
Years Of College Gains For Latinos Endangered
US Life Expectancy Falls By A Year In Pandemic
Democrats Face Divisions On Next Big Spending Bill
Honduran Leader With Lots To Lose Courts Biden
Millions Still In Dark Amid A Winter's Fury

Financial Times:

Facebook Bans Australian News As Impact Of Media Law Is Felt Globally
Mario Draghi Lays Out Ambitious Reforms For Italy
Texans Demand Answers After Dramatic Collapse In Power Supply
EU Announces Fresh Vaccine Deal With Moderna

Story Lineup From Last Night's Network News:

ABC: Texas-Winter Storm; Vaccine Delays; Weather Report; Biden-Agenda; Counterfeit N95 Masks; COVID-Variants; Rush Limbaugh; Flu Season; Prince Philip Hospitalized; Houston-Helping Neighbors.
CBS: Texas-Winter Storm; Weather Report; Vaccine Delays; Biden-Agenda; Biden-Netanyahu; Counterfeit N95 Masks; Rush Limbaugh; Prince Philip Hospitalized; Ashley Judd-Hiking Rescue; Americans Come Together In Pandemic.
NBC: Texas-Winter Storm; Texas-Power Grid; Weather Report; Vaccine Delays; Biden-Agenda; Harris-Schools Reopening; COVID-Students; Biden-Student Loan Debt; Rush Limbaugh; Eagle Scouts.

Network TV At A Glance:
Texas-Winter Storm – 10 minutes, 40 seconds
Biden-Agenda – 5 minutes, 55 seconds
Rush Limbaugh – 5 minutes, 55 seconds
Vaccine Delays – 5 minutes, 25 seconds

Last Laughs

Late Night Political Humor.

Trevor Noah: "After all that talk from Trump, Biden is the one that will have people saying 'Merry Christmas' again. But that's right, Biden is predicting that COVID-19 will be gone from our lives by the end of this year, just in time for COVID-21 to kick into high gear."

Trevor Noah: "And I'm really hopeful that Biden is right, because if things are normal by Christmas, that means Santa can come down the chimney and put my presents under the tree again – unlike last year, when he threw them through my living room window."

Trevor Noah: "Now out of office, Donald Trump is back at the helm of his business empire and trying to figure out how to make money without being able to overcharge the Secret Service. But today, he watched a piece of that empire literally collapse. ... Whoa, hold up. People paid almost 600 bucks to watch that building get demolished? Did they know Trump wasn't inside? I mean, forget hotels. Trump just needs to build [stuff] with his name on it, and then charge people to watch him blow it up. It will be the most profitable business he's ever had!"

Trevor Noah: "It really says something when even Atlantic City is like, 'Trump is giving a bad name to our town full of pawn shops and strip clubs. It's gotta go. We can't be associated with that name.'"

Trevor Noah: [On former President Trump saying Senate Minority Leader McConnell has "too many chins and not enough brains"] "While Trump's hotel was exploding from within, so is the party that Trump leads. In the wake of the Capitol riots...a split has emerged in the party between Trump loyalists and traditional conservatives like Mitch McConnell, who blamed Trump for the riot and basically called for him to be charged with crimes. Well, now, Trump is striking back. ... Okay, you know what? How dare you, Donald? Mitch McConnell does not have multiple chins, okay? He doesn't have any chins. He has a neck sack that he developed to store air so he can breathe underwater! Learn some biology!"

Trevor Noah: "This is some fancy trash talk. 'Dour, sullen.' I think this proves that social media makes you dumber. I mean, Trump's been off Twitter for a couple weeks, and he's already learning a new SAT word a day. He also called Mitch 'unsmiling,' which is just such classic Trump. No matter who you are, Trump will find a way to sexually harass you. 'Mitch, you're a failure. A disaster for party. And why don't you smile more, baby? Come on, show us a little smile.'"

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Jimmy Kimmel: "The White House is said to be in talks with Amazon right now to help distribute the vaccine. The way it will work is, any Prime member who can prove they've watched all six seasons of 'Bosch' will get vaccinated."

Jimmy Kimmel: "Our new President held a CNN town hall with Anderson Cooper last night. He said he's tired of talking about Donald Trump. And referred to Donald Trump as 'the former guy.' Which I love, because he will hate that more than anything."

Jimmy Kimmel: "Joe knows that the way to deflate Trump is to ignore him. But it's hard. He's like a 2-year-old. You worry that if you take your eye off him, he'll flush your keys down the toilet."

Jimmy Kimmel: "One of the former President's most famous failures, the Trump Plaza Casino, was imploded today in Atlantic City. Every chapter of Trump's biography is 11."

Jimmy Kimmel: "Team Trump put out a statement saying that Giuliani is not currently representing Trump in any legal matters. ... And with Trump off his plate now, Rudy has more time for his true passion – walking the streets of Ukraine screaming Hunter Biden's name."

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From: Fritz, Craig (NIH/OD) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=79148D8C0CEE49689FD637304BB82B42-FRITZCM]
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• Biden Administration Will Spend $1.6B To Expand COVID-19 Testing.
• C.D.C. Announces $200 Million 'Down Payment' To Track Virus Variants.
• Expert Concerned About New Coronavirus Variants.
• Harris Says Teachers Should Be Prioritized For Covid-19 Vaccinations.
• CNN's John Berman Chides White House Aide On Reopening Schools: 'Not A Trick Question'.
• Coronavirus Cases Plummet To Pre-Thanksgiving Levels. Are More Reopenings Next?

• CDC's Covid-19 School Guidance Leaves Some Reassured, Others Confused.
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• Health Officials Investigating Potential COVID-19 South African Variant In Reno.
• Lowering Covid-19 Cases Is The Best Thing US Can Do To Improve Chances That Vaccines Will Continue Working, Expert Says.
• Washington Post Fact-Checker Gives Harris 'Two Pinocchios' For 'Starting From Scratch' Vaccine Claim.
• CNN, Washington Post Fact-Checkers Explain Away Biden Vaccinations 'Gaffe' At Town Hall.
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• Shock: Just Half To Get Coronavirus Vaccine, Rest Cite Safety, Effectiveness, Needles.
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• Too High? Too Low? One Thing's For Sure: The Covid Relief Bill Is About Far More Than Covid Relief.
• The Myth Of 'Good Covid Vaccines' And 'Bad Covid Vaccines'.
• Fauci: There's Evidence COVID-19 Vaccines Don't Just Protect You – They May Stop You From Spreading The Virus To Others, Too.
• HHS Is About To Launch A $115 Million Vaccine Education Campaign – Here Are All The Ad Agencies Benefiting From It.
• The US Isn't Prepared For A New, More Infectious Variant To Be Dominant By March – Even With Vaccinations Underway.
• Congress To Hold Hearing On News Media's Role In Promoting Conspiracy Theories About COVID-19 And The 2020 Election.
• Christians Should Learn The Power Of 'Bite Me'.
• 'Either Not Telling The Truth Or Mentally Gone': Trump Rips Biden Over Vaccine Claim.
• Psaki Defends Harris 'Starting From Scratch' COVID Vaccine Remarks.
• Surprise Find In COVID-19 Brain Capillaries.
• Humidity: Another Reason Face Masks May Protect Against Severe Covid-19.
• All Of Us Research: Participants Are Now Getting Back Genetic Results.
• RADx Expects COVID-19 Portfolio To Accelerate An Era Of At-Home Infectious Disease Testing.
• NIAID ACTIV-2 Trial Begins Phase 2/3 Testing On Four COVID-19 Therapeutics.
• A Next Generation Coronavirus Vaccine Is In The Works. But Initial Funding Was Denied.
• Pfizer Says South African Variant Could Significantly Reduce Vaccine Protection.
• SolarWinds Hacks Perpetrated From Inside U.S., White House Says.
• Dr. Moncef Slaoui Calls Out Biden For Claiming COVID Vaccine Distribution As His Administration's Own.
• Joe Biden Should Declare A Food And Nutrition War.
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• COVID-19 Vaccine Shortage Compels US Diplomats To Seek Doses From Foreign Governments.
• Poll Finds 73% Of Americans Believe COVID-19 Vaccine Will Be Widely Available By Summer's End.

• Biden Adviser Lacks Explanation About Why California, Florida Have Similar COVID-19 Data Despite Vastly Different Policies.
• White House Adviser Addresses Concerns About The Efficacy Of Vaccines Against Coronavirus Variants.
• GOP Campaign Arm Targeting Dems Over School Reopenings In New Ad.
• Technology, Health Experts Urge Feds To Build Working IT Systems To Handle COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution, Share Data.
• Some 130 Cancer Centers, Organizations Ask Biden To Make COVID-19 Vaccines For People With Cancer A Priority.
• Commentary Warns Pandemic Will Worsen Unless US Continues To Slow The Spread Of Coronavirus.
• USAToday: Biden's Failure To Reopen Schools Shows He Has Yet To Learn Lessons About Not Following The Science.
• Commentary Says Biden Is Taking Action To Ensure The Safe Reopening Of Schools.
• Commentary Criticizes Biden About COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution, School Reopenings.
• Columnist Says Pandemic Is Allowing Biden To Advance A Broader Economic Agenda.
• North Dakota Detects First Two Cases Of UK Coronavirus Variant In State.
• Michigan Prison Has Detected 90 Cases Of UK Coronavirus Variant.
• Wake County, North Carolina Cancels Drive-Through Vaccination Clinic Due To Ice Storm.
• New York Has Confirmed 82 Cases Of UK Coronavirus Variant, Governor Says.
• Maryland Officials Detect Brazilian Coronavirus Variant For First Time.
• CDC Report: LGBTQ People Have Higher Rates Of Underlying Health Issues That Lead To Greater COVID-19 Risks.
• Colorado Reports Fewest COVID-19 Outbreaks Since Mid-November.
• Americans Could Soon Have Ability To Choose Between Two Labeled Levels Of Mask Protection.
• Biden Says COVID-19 Vaccines Will Be Available To All US Residents By July.
• Biden's Visit To Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine Plant In Michigan Postponed By One Day.
• Commentary: Biden Has No National Plan For Vaccinating Teachers Against COVID-19.
• Editorial: Biden Administration Making School Reopenings More Difficult.
• Analysis Examines Why COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Appears "Chaotic And Incomprehensible."
• WSJournal Says $1.9T COVID-19 Relief Plan Includes $22B Tax Hike Impacting Multinational Companies.
• Opinion: Risks Of Not Spending Enough On COVID-19 Relief More Damaging Than Spending Too Much.
• Neanderthal DNA May Be Linked To Lower Risk Of Severe COVID-19, Researchers Say.
• Brazilian Laboratory Says Sinovac Vaccine Is Effective Against UK, South African Variants.
• Zients Says J&J Has Only A Few Million Doses Of Its Experimental COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Financial Analysts Suggest FDA Could Reject AstraZeneca's COVID-19 Vaccine For Efficacy, Manufacturing Process.
• Cuba's Sovereign 2 Vaccine Nearing Final Trials.
• One-Third Of Military Service Members Have Chosen Not To Receive COVID-19 Vaccinations, Pentagon Officials Say.
• Native Americans Embrace COVID-19 Vaccine In Greater Numbers Than Other Minority Communities.
• Israeli Healthcare Provider Finds Pfizer Vaccine Was 95% Effective Against COVID-19 In Large Trial.
• Opinion: Pharmacies Are Vital To American COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout, But They Can Do More.

• Many Americans Reportedly Experiencing “Vaccine Envy” As They Wait Their Turn For COVID-19 Vaccine.
• COVID-19 Infection Rates Among People Who Received Moderna, Pfizer Vaccines Were Almost 89% Lower, Large-Scale Study Suggests.
• Winter Weather Delays Delivery Of COVID-19 Vaccines Across The US.
• New York Governor Accused Of Threatening Assemblyman Who Criticized Him.
• FBI, US Attorney Investigating New York Governor’s Handling Of Nursing Homes During The COVID-19 Pandemic.
• Opinion: New York Governor’s Actions Worse Than A Coverup.
• Opinion: New Yorkers Living In Discouraging Reality Under Gov. Cuomo.
• New York To Reopen Indoor Family Entertainment, Outdoor Amusement Parks.
• Nebraska Likely To Receive More Than 60K COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.
• LA County Elementary Schools Allowed To Reopen, But Return To Class Will Be Uneven.
• LATimes: LA Unified School District Superintendent Needs To Demand Teachers Return To Classrooms.
• California’s COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Does Not Prioritize Some Essential Workers.
• First Two FEMA Mass COVID-19 Vaccination Sites Open In California.
• North Carolina Alters COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Guidance, Making It Permissible To Refuse COVID-19 Vaccine To Travelers.
• Michigan Restaurants Propose Tying Indoor Capacity Limits To COVID-19 Positivity Rate.
• More Than 100K COVID-19 Vaccine Appointments Delayed In Pennsylvania.
• Massachusetts Residents Aged 65-74, Those With Underlying Health Conditions Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Massachusetts Legislators To Hold Oversight Hearings On State’s COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.
• Colorado Governor Will Not Allow Denver Mayor To Administer COVID-19 Vaccine To Homeless Ahead Of Schedule.
• More Than 695K Minnesotans Have Received The COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Minnesota Governor Wants All Schools To Offer Some Form Of In-Person Learning By March 8.
• New Jersey Governor Extends Public-Health Emergency To Mid-March.
• Error Causes Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine Shortage In Pennsylvania.
• Editorial: California Governor Turns To Corporate Contacts To Roll Out COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Colorado Governor Urges Congress To Take Action On COVID-19 Stimulus Plan.
• Iowa Cancels Deal With Microsoft To Develop Centralized System For COVID-19 Vaccine Scheduling.
• Detroiters Aged 60-64 With Chronic Medical Conditions Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Connecticut Legislators Conclude 24-Hour Hearing On Vaccination Rules For Public School Children.
• Soft Launch Of Nevada’s New COVID-19 Vaccine Appointment Registration System To Occur Next Week.
• Californians With Low Incomes To Receive $600 Stimulus Payment Under $9.6B COVID-19 Economic Recovery Package.
• Op-Ed: Los Angeles’ Distribution Of COVID-19 Vaccines A “Confusing” Process.
• Florida Governor Defends Controversial COVID-19 Pop-Up Vaccination Clinic In Affluent Community.
• Maine AG Issues Warning Against Administering COVID-19 Vaccine To Ineligible People.
• Chicago Spent $281.5M Of $1.2B COVID-19 Pandemic Relief Money On Police Department.
• California Fines McDonald’s Franchisee For Firing Workers Who Raise COVID-19 Safety Concerns.

• Nevadans Aged 65-69 Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine Next Week.
• Ohio Senate Passes Bill To Limit Governor's Health Orders.
• NYC Fixing COVID-19 Vaccine Registration System.
• Cannabis Workers, Veterinarians Receive Top Priority For COVID-19 Vaccine In California.
• Leaders In DC Area Begin Lifting Some COVID-19 Restrictions.
• Biden's Openness On Minimum Wage Negotiations May Not Please Progressives.
• Debate Over Whether $15 Minimum Wage Would Boost Workers Or Kill Jobs Rages.
• Consumers Used Stimulus Checks To Boost Economy, Retail Spending In January.
• Millions Of US Jobs Unlikely To Come Back After Pandemic, Economists Warn.
• As Democrats Work To Pass Virus Relief, Divisions Appear On Next Legislative Package.
• Democrats Face Internal Clash Over Raising Minimum Wage.
• Allies Creating Nonprofit Group To Push Bidens' Agenda.
• Opinion: Debate Over Pandemic Relief Ignoring Shifting Of Jobs From One Sector To Another.
• Opinion: Biden Relief Package Would Give Congress Time To Work On Longer-Term Answer To Health Insurance.
• IRS: Some Stimulus Checks May Still Be In The Mail.
• Biden's COVID-19 Relief Legislation Is Also An ACA Expansion Bill.
• Proposals Could Result In Universal Basic Income For Kids In US.
• COVID-19 Vaccine Collaboration Illustrates Potential Of Public-Private Partnerships, Teva Executive Says.
• HHS Signs Contract For Special Syringes To Extract Six Doses Of Pfizer Vaccine.
• Developing Countries Falling Dangerously Behind On COVID-19 Vaccinations.
• Federal Mask Mandate "Comes Far Too Late," Contributor Says.
• Federal Agents Have Seized More Than 10M Fake N95 Masks In Recent Weeks.
• COVID-19 Vaccines Have Potential To "Decimate" Demand For Testing.
• Opinion: Pandemic Has Made The Goal Of Individualized Education Easier To Achieve.
• Many Americans Expect Coronavirus Disruptions To Last Into Second Half Of 2021, Poll Indicates.
• Mental Health Providers Stretched Thin As Demand For Services Surges.
• Ninety-Year-Old Woman Treks Six Miles Through Snow To Get COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Opinion: Home-Delivery Of COVID-19 Vaccines To Seniors, People With Disabilities In Conflict With California's Goal Of Rapidly Increasing Inoculations.
• Analysis Highlights Takeaways From COVID-19 Vaccine "Policy Hackathon."
• Don't 'Hector' Workers Over Vaccine, Warns Top US Business Group (CDC Mentioned).
• Editorial: US COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Is More Effective Than It Might Seem.
• Arizona Senate Panel Approves Measure To Legalize Test Strips To Detect Fentanyl.
• Inspector General Report Says HUD Has Neglected To Enforce Environmental Regulations, Potentially Jeopardizing Health Of Thousands.
• Flu Season Has Been Virtually Nonexistent.
• Former Theranos Official To Testify That Company's Leaders Rejected Idea That Blood-Testing Technology Was Not Accurate Enough.
• Airlines Ban Emotional-Support Animals, But Trained Service Dogs Can Fly For Free.
• STAT Profiles Truveta Which Aims To Sell De-Identified Medical Data To Answer Questions.

• Bluebird Bio Suspends Operations Of Gene Therapy For Sickle Cell Disease After Two More Cancer Diagnoses.
• Study Adds To Mounting Evidence That Synonymous Variants Can Have Consequences.
• If Woman Has Heart Health Factors While Pregnant, Her Child May Have Poor Heart Health Years Later, Study Suggests.
• Utah Bill Attempts To Undo Some Vaping Restrictions.
• Indian River County May Raise Legal Age To Buy Tobacco To 21.
• Vermont Lawmakers Considering Ban On Sales Of Flavored Cigarettes, E-Cigarettes.
• Arizona Lawmakers Considering Bill Allowing Women To Skip Trip To Physician's Office To Obtain Birth Control.
• GSK, Vir Biotechnology To Expand Partnership To Develop Therapies For Diseases Beyond COVID-19.
• Opinion Offers Advice On Shifting The Drug Development Paradigm For Rare Diseases.
• FDA Recalls Lots Of Capsules Containing Undeclared Sildenafil, Tadalafil.
• North Carolina Man Pleads Guilty To Distributing Unapproved Drugs After Selling Fake Diet Pills.
• San Francisco Biotechnology Firm Lands Two Big Deals For Cancer-Fighting Drug.
• SpyBiotech Raises $32.5M For Its Vaccine Technology.

Global Health News

• Taiwan To Receive COVID-19 Vaccines From BioNTech, Company Says.
• State Department Says US Will Pay Over $200M In Current Dues To WHO.
• India To Make COVID-19 Molecular Tests Mandatory For People Arriving From UK, South Africa, Brazil.
• Nepal Authorizes COVID-19 Vaccine Developed By Sinopharm Affiliate.
• UN Chief Calls For Global Vaccination Plan To Ensure Equitable COVID-19 Shot Distribution.
• EU Says It Is On Track To Have Up To 2.6 Billion COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.
• South Africa Begins Administering J&J's COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Some European Healthcare Workers Pushing For COVID-19 Vaccines From Moderna, Pfizer Over AstraZeneca.
• Pfizer Has Yet To Deliver Roughly 10 Million COVID-19 Vaccine Doses To EU Due In December.
• Central European Leaders Push For Faster COVID-19 Vaccine Deliveries.
• Japan Launches COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign.
• Senegal To Receive 200,000 Doses Of Sinopharm's COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Britain Becomes First Country To Approve Human Challenge Trials For COVID-19.
• Britain Proposes UN Draft Resolution Calling For COVID-19 Vaccination Ceasefires.
• 'Horrifying' Death Toll Prompts Calls To Prioritize Jabs For Disabled.
• Turkey To Slowly Return To Normal Life On Regional Basis Starting Next Month, Erdogan Says.
• Venezuela To Start Vaccinating Medical Personnel Against COVID-19 This Week, Maduro Says.
• India Offers To Vaccinate All UN Peacekeepers Globally Against COVID-19.
• China Blocking Taiwan's Attempt To Purchase Five Million COVID-19 Doses From BioNTech, Health Minister Says.
• Israel Allows Palestinian Authority To Deliver First COVID-19 Vaccines To Gaza Strip.
• Tanzania's President Falsely Claims His Country Is "COVID-Free."

• Belgian Teachers Threaten To Strike Unless They Get Access To COVID-19 Vaccines.
• Russia, China Using COVID-19 Vaccine Supply To Boost Geopolitical Influence.
• Iran Says Its COVIran Barakat Vaccine Is "100% Effective" Against UK Coronavirus Variant.
• India's Largest Healthcare Chain Expects Private COVID-19 Vaccine Market To Open Up Within Weeks.
• South Africa Coronavirus Variant Associated With 16-Fold Increase In COVID-19 Cases In Zambia.
• Namibia Will Roll Out AstraZeneca's COVID-19 Vaccine Despite South Africa Halting Distribution Amid New Coronavirus Variant.
• COVAX-Participating Countries Will Soon Receive Information On First COVID-19 Vaccine Shipments, PAHO Says.
• Sao Paulo's Serrana Selected For Population-Wide COVID-19 Vaccination Study.
• Toronto Health Officials Want Ontario Government To Extend Lockdown.
• Mexico Pleads For Countries To Stop Hoarding COVID-19 Vaccines.
• Public Outcry Continues In Peru Over Secret COVID-19 Vaccinations Among Wealthy.
• Most Countries In Europe Ignoring Mentally Ill In COVID-19 Vaccine Plans, Groups Say.
• New COVID-19 Infections In England Fall Significantly In Recent Weeks.
• People In Brazil Getting COVID-19 Vaccines Illicitly, Then Bragging About It On Social Media.
• Coronavirus Infections, Deaths Falling Worldwide.
• Africa Nears 100K COVID-19 Deaths.
• Canadian Researchers Urge Delay In Administering Second Dose Of Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine.
• UK Planning First Human Challenge Study For COVID-19.
• Air Pollution Led To Tens Of Thousands Of Fatalities In World's Five Most Populous Cities In 2020, Researchers Say.

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• Editorial: Becerra Is Troubling Choice For HHS Secretary.
• "Bristol Variant" Of Coronavirus Identified In US For First Time.
• Kessler Discusses Drop In COVID-19 Cases In US During Interview.
• Biden Administration Rejects Calls To Update Guidelines That Discourage Americans From Using N95 Respirators.
• Opinion: Teachers Unions, "Team Biden" Holding Back Schools From Reopening Full-Time.
• Analysis: Pandemic Provides Opportunity For American Healthcare System To Be Fixed.
• Biden Has Reportedly Selected Former Obama Official To Lead CMS.
• Biden Administration Announces Latest Round Of HHS Appointments.
• Supreme Court Review Of Medicaid Work Rules Hinges On Verma Letters.
• Biden Administration Appears To Withdraw Final Rule On Prior Authorization.
• HHS Needs To Overhaul Value-Based Payment Approach, Report Says.
• Woodcock Refutes Idea Of Establishing Firewall Between FDA, Drug Companies For Approvals.
• More Than 150 Democratic Congressmen Urge Court To Lift FDA's Restrictions On Prescribing Mifepristone.

• FDA Leaders Say Agency Made Mistake In Allowing COVID-19 Antibody Tests To Be Sold, Shipped Without Being Reviewed.

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• USA Today Analysis: Expected Retirements Will Give Biden Chances To Put Black Women On Federal Bench.
• Milley And Esper Held Back Promotion Recommendations For Female Generals Until Trump Left Office.
• Biden Using Twitter For "Policy, Not Personal Insults."
• Senators Call On DeJoy To Address "Unacceptable Delays" In Mail Delivery.
• Millions Remain Without Power As Another Major Winter Storm Looms.
• Media Analyses: Trump-McConnell Feud Could Hurt GOP Prospects In 2022.
• Barabak: Changing Times, "Talk Of Mental Decline" Drive Calls For Feinstein To Resign.
• Democrat Lasry Enters Wisconsin Senate Race.
• Limbaugh Dies At 70.

NIH News

The Government Agency That Helped Develop The COVID Vaccine In Record Time Can't Get Shots For Its Own Workers, Emails Show.

Kimberly Leonard, Robin Bravender and Elvina Nawaguna write for Business Insider (2/17, 2.74M) that most "employees at the government agency that helped develop the coronavirus vaccine haven't been able to get the shot, internal emails obtained by Insider show." Data indicate the NIH "has vaccinated just over 3,000 of its employees within its Maryland locations." That figure represents "a small fraction of NIH's overall workforce, including 20,260 at its headquarters in Bethesda, Maryland." The piece mentions NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins and NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Fauci Discusses Timeline For General Access To COVID-19 Vaccines, Says Vaccinating All Teachers Before Reopening Schools Is "Non-Workable."

On CBS This Morning (2/17, 2.47M), NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, the White House's chief medical adviser, discussed when COVID-19 vaccines might be available to the general public. He said, "We were hoping that it would be the end of April, but what has happened is that the doses that we were expecting earlier from J&J likely will not be available for another couple of months after that. The ultimate total amount of doses that J&J will get us, we're pretty confident that we're going to get the 100 million doses by the end of June, the beginning of July. And I believe that's the reason why when President was saying available by July, it was in tune

with the fact that we will get those doses that we were promised. And I'm sure we'll get them by that time. So I think the dates now coincide pretty well."

Additional Sources. Politico (2/17, Leonard, 6.73M) reports Fauci also told CBS that "vaccinating all teachers against Covid-19 before reopening schools is 'non-workable,' wading into an issue that has taken center stage for the Biden administration amid the ongoing pandemic." Fauci stated, "If you are going to say that every single teacher needs to be vaccinated before you get back to school, I believe quite frankly that's a non-workable situation." The article says his "assessment on Wednesday of vaccination plans for teachers laid down a marker that others in the Biden administration have thus far been unwilling to match amid a heated debate over reopening schools."

The Hill (2/17, Axelrod, 5.69M) reports, however, that Fauci added, "I think teachers should absolutely be priority among those who we consider essential personnel, and you should try and get as many teachers as you possibly can vaccinated as quickly as you possibly can."

The Daily Caller (2/17, Safi, 375K) also covers the story.

Fauci, White House Told Masks Needed Due To Virus Variants.

Bloomberg Law (2/17, Hussein, Subscription Publication, 4K) reports NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "and two other Biden administration officials have been urged by 13 doctors and scientists from across the U.S. to take immediate action to curb the aerosolized spread of the coronavirus before variant strains of the contagion spread widely, wiping out recent progress to curb the pandemic."

Additional Sources. CNBC (2/17, Feuer, 7.34M) reports these "scientists are pushing the Biden administration to require N95 air filtration masks for employees in risky workplaces like meat packing plants and prisons." They "called on the administration to acknowledge that the virus is more airborne than previously thought, especially with the rise of more contagious variants. The highly effective masks filter out about 95% of all small particles."

Kaiser Health News (2/17, Jewett) reports this group of scientists says "even though the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has acknowledged the virus can spread through tiny airborne particles, it needs to take 'strong immediate' action to update its guidance to reduce the risk." Some of these safety measures "include broader use of N95 masks in workplaces as well as better ventilation."

Fauci Discusses COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout, Herd Immunity In Interview.

In an interview on CNN's Anderson Cooper 360 (2/17, 1.22M), NIAID Director Anthony Fauci discussed the COVID-19 vaccine rollout and herd immunity. Fauci said, "By July, by the end of July, there will be available" the amount of COVID-19 "vaccine to essentially vaccinate everybody in the country, because that is what you would need is about 600 million doses...for about 300 million people." Fauci also said herd immunity will "depend on how many people want to get vaccinated, and that's the reason why we're putting a big push on getting out and extending ourselves into the community, particularly the minority community, to address...vaccine hesitancy."

Additional Source. CNN (2/18, Cooper, 89.21M) reports Fauci "said that Americans should continue wearing their masks and social distancing even after getting the vaccine because they can still spread coronavirus."

Fauci Emphasizes Importance Of Vaccine In University Of Montana Discussion.

The Helena (MT) Independent Record (2/17, Evans, 97K) reports NIAID Director "Dr. Anthony Fauci said the words many people have been waiting to hear when he called the COVID-19 vaccine the 'light at the end of the tunnel' during the University of Montana's annual Mansfield Lecture on Wednesday." However, "the pace at which the nation approaches the end of the pandemic depends on how many people get vaccinated, he said." He "said he thinks the United States will approach 'a degree of normality' by mid-fall or sooner 'if we could get past this issue of vaccine hesitancy where a significant number of people may not want to get vaccinated.'"

Fauci Says Studies Suggest COVID-19 Vaccines May Slow The Spread Of Coronavirus.

NBC News (2/17, Miller, 4.91M) reports, "A growing body of evidence suggests that the Covid-19 vaccine can slow the spread of the coronavirus, Dr. Anthony Fauci said Wednesday." He said during a White House briefing that it remains a "looming question" whether someone infected with coronavirus can transmit it to someone else. "'There have been some studies that are pointing in a very favorable direction,' he said, adding that these studies will have to be corroborated by additional research."

Additional Source. The Washington Times (2/17, 626K) also covers the story.

Fauci To Americans: 'When Your Turn To Get Vaccinated Comes Up, Get Vaccinated'.

Fox News (2/17, Singman, 23.99M) reports that on Wednesday, NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci sent "a message to Americans -- urging them to 'get vaccinated' against the novel coronavirus when they become eligible." Fauci said, "When your turn to get vaccinated comes up, get vaccinated." He added, "It is not only good for you, and good for your family and your community. ... It will have a very important impact on the dynamics of the outbreak in our country."

"Globally Inspiring" Fauci Wins $1M Dan David Prize.

Genetic Engineering & Biotechnology News (2/17, 189K) reports, "Anthony S. Fauci, MD, director of the NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), has won one of this year's three $1 million Dan David Prizes, awarded to individuals and organizations deemed to be 'globally inspiring.'" Fauci is "the winner of the 'Present' category of Public Health." Another winner of a Dan David Prize was "Steven Rosenberg, MD, PhD, chief surgery branch senior investigator head, tumor immunology section of the National Cancer Institute."

Additional Source. OncLive (2/17) also reports.

Fauci Lauds Montana Link In Vaccine History.

The Billings (MT) Gazette (2/17, Chaney, 179K) reports, "Although he won't be personally in Missoula for his lecture on Wednesday, Dr. Anthony Fauci's Montana ties run much thicker than a Zoom call." The country's "top adviser on the COVID-19 pandemic response and director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases since 1984 was also close friends with one of the pioneers in vaccine research at Hamilton's Rocky Mountain Laboratory, Maurice Hilleman." Speaking of Hilleman in an interview with Missoulian Tuesday, Fauci said, "He's one of the most underappreciated scientific assets this country ever had."

Covid-19 Variants Could Fuel Another Surge. Fauci Says We Have Two Powerful Tools Against Them.

CNN International (2/18, Maxouris) reports CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said during a White House briefing that "the continued spread of variants that are more transmissible could jeopardize the progress we have made in the last month if we let our guard down," adding that lowering the number of cases will give "fewer opportunities for the variants to spread and fewer opportunities for new variants to emerge." However, "the US has two powerful tools that can help against its spread and move the country further out of the pandemic's tunnel, Dr. Anthony Fauci told CNN on Wednesday night." Fauci said, "The two ways that we can counter that is one, continue to do the kinds of public health interventions that we talk about all the time."

New CDC Reports Warn Variants Could Lead To Rapid Rise In Covid-19 Cases.

CNN (2/17, Gumbrecht, 89.21M) reports CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said the US needs to reduce the spread of SARS-CoV-2 in order to curb the spread of more dangerous variants. Dr. Walensky said, "I know these variants are concerning, especially as we're seeing signs of progress. I'm talking about them today because I am concerned, too." A study published in the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report "detailed cases of the B.1.1.7 variant – first identified in the United Kingdom – among eight Minnesota residents."

Additional Source. CNBC (2/17, Higgins-Dunn, 7.34M) reports Dr. Walensky co-authored a perspective piece published in JAMA with White House Chief Medical Advisor and NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, as well as Dr. Henry Walke, the CDC's Covid incident manager, expressing their concerns about the variants. The three co-authors wrote that the B.1.1.7 variant is highly infectious and "preliminary data suggest the possibility of increased severity of disease with infection."

Biden Team Struggles To Specify When Schools Will Open, Normalcy Will Return.

The Washington Post (2/17, Wootson, Meckler, 10.52M) reports as the US "approaches the one-year mark of the pandemic's isolation and restrictions, the Biden administration is struggling to give precise, consistent answers to two key questions: When will the pandemic truly be behind us," and when can schools safely reopen? President Biden "has blamed miscommunication for some of the inconsistency" about when the country can return to normal, "but his administration – which has promised to use science and data as the basis for pivotal decisions – is also grappling with the fact that science and data don't produce answers as tidy or linear as campaign promises." The article discusses comments by NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci and CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky.

Additional Sources. The AP (2/17, Jaffe) reports "Biden is in a political firestorm over how and when to get more schools open amid the coronavirus pandemic, with Republicans seizing on confusion surrounding Biden's goal to reopen a majority of schools within his first 100 days to paint the president as beholden to teachers' unions at the expense of American families." The "administration in recent weeks has sent muddled and at times contradictory messages about Biden's goal." The President's "aides dismiss the controversy as a flareup that will disappear once the coronavirus is better under control and more school districts reopen," yet "there could be lingering damage if Biden is seen to break an early promise on an issue so important to so many Americans."

NBC Nightly News (2/17, story 5, 1:25, Holt, 6.24M) reported that "vaccine shortages have factored into a new timeline by President Biden for when all Americans can get the shot. He's also offering a new goal for reopening schools." President Biden was shown saying, "By the end of July, we'll have over 600 million doses,

enough to vaccinate every single American." Asked when schools will be open five days a week, Biden responded, "I think we'll be close to that by the end of the first 100 days."

CNN (2/17, Klein, Sullivan, 89.21M) reports, "The White House has continued to clarify its position on when and how schools should safely reopen, an issue that has become a national flashpoint since the coronavirus pandemic forced many classes online." Administration officials indicated that "while they do not believe teachers need to be vaccinated in order to reopen schools, they think teachers should be prioritized for vaccinations like frontline workers." For instance, Fauci said, "Even though we don't feel that every teacher needs to be vaccinated before you can open a school, that doesn't take away from the fact that we strongly support the vaccination of teachers."

Fox News (2/17, Singman, 23.99M) reports on Wednesday, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the Biden Administration "believes vaccines for teachers are not a prerequisite to reopening schools – but instead, a recommended 'mitigation step.'" Her "comments come after Vice President Kamala Harris was asked during an interview on NBC's 'Today' whether the White House believed it was safe for teachers to return to the classroom without a vaccine for the novel coronavirus."

Among other news outlets covering the story are the CBS Evening News (2/17, story 4, 1:40, O'Donnell, 4.82M), ABC World News Tonight (2/17, story 4, 2:50, Muir, 7.78M), The Hill (2/17, Chalfant, 5.69M), the New York Post (2/17, Bowden, 7.45M), and National Review (2/17, McArdle, 798K).

Biden Administration Will Spend $1.6B To Expand COVID-19 Testing.

NBC News (2/17, 4.91M) reports, "The Biden administration said it will spend $1.6 billion to expand Covid-19 testing in schools and underserved areas, increase testing supply production and expand genomic sequencing, a move administration officials described as a "bridge" until Congress approves more funding." According to NBC News, "The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will spend an additional $200 million to identify and track new strains of the virus, increasing the sequencing capacity by threefold."

Additional Sources. CNBC (2/17, Feuer, 7.34M) reports, "The Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense will invest $650 million to expand testing in K-8 schools and 'underserved congregate settings, such as homeless shelters,' the White House said." In a statement, HHS Acting Secretary Norris Cochran said, "As part of the President's national strategy to combat COVID-19, we will deploy every available resource to ensure that more individuals and families have access to testing options during this unprecedented time and that our nation is prepared to contain and prevent the spread of possible variants."

Roll Call (2/17, Cohen, 130K) reports, "National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony Fauci said it would be impractical to require all teachers to get vaccinated before returning to in-person learning but encouraged states to make teachers a vaccination group priority." The CDC's "school reopening plan does not require that all teachers be vaccinated."

NPR (2/17, Wamsley, 3.69M) reports Jeffrey Zients, the White House COVID-19 response coordinator, "acknowledged that Johnson & Johnson will not have much vaccine available to distribute right away — assuming the company gets FDA authorization in the next few weeks."

Also reporting are Bloomberg (2/17, Wingrove, Edney, 3.57M), The Hill (2/17, Sullivan, 5.69M), Politico (2/17, Lim, 6.73M), the New York Post (2/17, Jacobs, 7.45M), and the Washington Times (2/17, 626K).

C.D.C. Announces $200 Million 'Down Payment' To Track Virus Variants.

The New York Times (2/17, Zimmer, Weiland, 20.6M) reports "the Biden administration announced on Wednesday a new effort to ramp up" the US' "efforts to track coronavirus variants" by "pledging nearly $200 million to better identify the emerging threats." Describing it as "a 'down payment,' the White House said that the investment would result in a significant increase in the number of positive virus samples that labs could sequence." CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said, "When we will get to 25,000 [genomes a week] depends on the resources that we have at our fingertips and how quickly we can mobilize our partners." Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center evolutionary biologist Trevor Bedford "said there had been 'substantial gains' in national sequencing efforts since December."

Additional Sources. Bloomberg (2/17, Shah, 3.57M) reports "three worrisome Covid-19 variants are now circulating in the U.S. and the federal government needs significance resources to track their progress, according to" Walensky. The variants "emerged initially in the U.K., South Africa and Brazil," and "have all now been seen in the U.S., said...Walensky." One priority for combatting "the variants in the U.S. is to put strong public health surveillance in place that can track changes in the virus, according to Walensky."

CNN (2/17, Gumbrecht, 89.21M) reports "new coronavirus variants could lead to a rapid rise in Covid-19 cases, and can 'dangerously accelerate the trajectory of the pandemic,' US health officials warned Wednesday." Walensky said at a White House briefing, "I know these variants are concerning, especially as we're seeing signs of progress. ... I'm talking about them today because I am concerned, too." Meanwhile, in a commentary "published Wednesday, Walensky, Dr. Henry Walke from the CDC and" NIAID Director Anthony Fauci "wrote that genomic sequencing identified no cases of the B.1.351 variant in Zambia in March to early December 2020, but the variant was identified in 96% of samples sequenced from a one-week period in mid-December."

Expert Concerned About New Coronavirus Variants.

ABC World News Tonight (2/17, story 6, 1:40, Muir, 7.78M) reported the CDC is "warning again...about the more contagious [COVID-19] variants here in the US, [saying] that they could easily cause a rapid rise in cases and many believe that the UK variant still could become the main variant in the coming weeks here in the US." Brown University School of Public Health Dean Ashish Jha said, "I'm pretty concerned about these variants. I do expect they will become dominant by the latter half of March. They are more contagious and what we're all worried about is they're going to cause a big spike in cases." The broadcast added that NIAID Director Anthony Fauci showed vaccines can help reduce transmission of the coronavirus.

Harris Says Teachers Should Be Prioritized For Covid-19 Vaccinations.

NBC News (2/17, Shabad, 4.91M) reports on Wednesday, Vice President Kamala Harris said "teachers should be given priority for getting Covid-19 vaccinations, but wouldn't say if she believed that giving them the shots should be a prerequisite for reopening schools." During "her first live one-on-one network interview since taking office, Harris was asked by 'TODAY' show anchor Savannah Guthrie whether she could reassure teachers that it would be safe for them to go back to school even if they're not vaccinated." Harris stated, "Teachers should be a priority."

Additional Sources. Fox News (2/17, Singman, 23.99M) reports Harris also said, "Teachers are critical to our children's development, they should be able to teach in a safe place and expand the minds and the

opportunities of our children, so, teachers should be a priority along with other front-line workers. ... We're going to make them a priority." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Among other news outlets covering the story are NBC Nightly News (2/17, story 6, 3:05, Holt, 6.24M), The Hill (2/17, Jenkins, 5.69M), Newsweek (2/17, Cole, 2.67M), the New York Post (2/17, Jacobs, 7.45M), the Washington Times (2/17, Richardson, 626K), the Washington Examiner (2/17, Lim, 888K), and the Daily Caller (2/17, Olohan, 375K).

CNN's John Berman Chides White House Aide On Reopening Schools: 'Not A Trick Question'.

The Hill (2/17, Mastrangelo, 5.69M) reports on Wednesday, CNN anchor John Berman "pressed a top White House aide to clarify the Biden administration's stance on teacher vaccines amid the discussion on how to safely reopen schools during the coronavirus pandemic." He told Symone Sanders, chief spokesperson for Vice President Kamala Harris, "It's not a trick question. I feel like you guys have treated it like a trick question. ... I just want to know what the White House position is on whether teachers need to be vaccinated in order for kids to return safely return to school." The article mentions CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky and NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Coronavirus Cases Plummet To Pre-Thanksgiving Levels. Are More Reopenings Next?

The Los Angeles Times (2/17, Money, Lin, 3.37M) reports coronavirus infections in California have fallen to pre-Thanksgiving levels, "bringing renewed optimism that a wider reopening of the still-shackled economy may be just around the corner." In the last week, "California has reported an average of 8,087 new coronavirus cases per day – a level not seen since mid-November, according to data compiled by The Times. That rolling average is down 53% from two weeks ago." Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) "hinted that more counties may emerge next week from what the state calls the purple tier – the strictest of California's four-rung reopening roadmap for businesses and other public spaces." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci is quoted as saying, "I do not believe that we should accept the inevitability of there being another surge."

CDC's Covid-19 School Guidance Leaves Some Reassured, Others Confused.

CNN (2/17, Howard, 89.21M) reports the CDC "released new guidance on Friday detailing strategies for how schools can open safely during the pandemic." Atlanta Public Schools Superintendent Lisa Herring "said that she felt reassured. The safety practices within the school district were among the CDC recommendations." The federal agency "still says its new guidelines provide strategies for schools to continue in-person learning, even in...Covid-19 transmission 'red' zones." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci said, "There can be some confusion there. What the guidelines are saying is that there are a number of things that you can mitigate to make it safer, regardless of what level you're in."

South African Coronavirus Variant Confirmed In Massachusetts Resident.

Fox News (2/17, Hein, 23.99M) reports "a case of the South African coronavirus variant was confirmed in a Massachusetts resident who has no reported travel history." On Tuesday, "officials said...the patient is a female in her 20s from Middlesex County, but did not reveal her current health status." One "news release said the variant was detected through genetic sequencing completed at the Broad Institute on behalf of the Department of

Public Health, and that it was the first case of the B.1.351 variant detected in the state." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci "has previously said the variants should serve as a 'wakeup call' for vaccine developers and those involved in the research to remain 'nimble' so that adjustments may be made when necessary."

Health Officials Investigating Potential COVID-19 South African Variant In Reno.

The Reno (NV) Gazette-Journal (2/17, Hidalgo, Wilkins, 219K) reports "health officials are investigating a potential case of the COVID-19 South African variant in Reno," Nevada. The investigation was revealed "by Washoe County Health District Officer Kevin Dick on Wednesday." If the potential case is "confirmed, it would be the first case of the B1.351 variant in Nevada." The South African variant was "found to be even more resistant to the current group of vaccines than the U.K. variant, according to" NIAID Director Anthony Fauci.

Lowering Covid-19 Cases Is The Best Thing US Can Do To Improve Chances That Vaccines Will Continue Working, Expert Says.

CNN (2/17, Maxouris, 89.21M) reports "lowering Covid-19 cases across the US isn't only critical to helping prevent another surge fueled by variants – it also makes vaccines more likely to continue working effectively against mutations, one expert says." Dr. Michael Mina, an epidemiologist and immunologist at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, said on Tuesday, "The best thing we could possibly do to improve the chances that the vaccine will continue working...is to reduce cases as much as possible without having those reductions occur as a result of vaccine-derived immunity." Mina added, "The more opportunities we give the virus to come in contact with somebody who is immune, the more opportunities there are for the virus to find a way around that level of immunity and those antibodies." The NIH and NIAID Director Anthony Fauci are mentioned.

Washington Post Fact-Checker Gives Harris 'Two Pinocchios' For 'Starting From Scratch' Vaccine Claim.

Fox News (2/17, Wulfsohn, 23.99M) reports, "Washington Post fact-checker Glenn Kessler challenged Vice President Kamala Harris' recent claim that the Biden administration was 'starting from scratch' with its coronavirus vaccine rollout." He "concluded that while Harris' claim that 'no national strategy or plan' can fall under a 'philosophical difference' between the Trump administration's state-level approach versus the federal oversight by the Biden administration, the vice president 'gets into trouble' with the 'starting from scratch' remark." Kessler wrote that Biden Administration officials "have built on an existing structure left behind by the Trump team. ... Harris modified her comment by saying 'in many ways,' but that's not quite enough to avoid Pinocchios. She earns Two." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

CNN, Washington Post Fact-Checkers Explain Away Biden Vaccinations 'Gaffe' At Town Hall.

Fox News (2/17, Rutz, 23.99M) reports, "Fact-checkers at CNN and The Washington Post were quick to explain and contextualize President Biden's statement Tuesday night that there was no coronavirus vaccine when he took office." The article says the "Post's Glenn Kessler and CNN's Daniel Dale, who vigorously fact-checked former President Donald Trump, wrote Biden had simply gaffed, since he mentioned earlier in the same town hall there had been 'only' 50 million vaccine doses when he took office." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Ingraham: Shifting Goalposts In Virus Battle Showing 'Democrats Hate Normal'

Fox News (2/17, Creitz, 23.99M) reports, "It's becoming increasingly clear that Joe Biden and the Democrats do not want life to return to pre-coronavirus 'normal' in America ever again, Laura Ingraham argued Wednesday night." "The Ingraham Angle" host said, "'If you thought because of vaccines and acquired immunity you'd be free from masks and COVID concerns by spring or summer, you have another think coming,' referring to Biden's statement Tuesday that he hopes 'by next Christmas,' the U.S. will be in a 'very different circumstance.'" Under the Biden Administration's "ever-shifting guidelines, Ingraham said, White House chief medical adviser Dr. Anthony Fauci and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will always have an upcoming holiday or other 'superspreader' event to warn Americans about."

Shock: Just Half To Get Coronavirus Vaccine, Rest Cite Safety, Effectiveness, Needles.

The Washington Examiner (2/17, Bedard, 888K) reports data from the latest edition of the "Back-to-Normal Barometer" survey indicate barely 50% "of the nation is planning to get the coronavirus vaccine, a surprising slap to the White House that has spent weeks urging the nation to get stuck." Of the 50% who were not eager to receive the vaccine, the survey "said that 12% were somewhat ready, 15% were somewhat not ready, and 23% strongly said they won't get it." According to the article, "The poll shows that despite photos of the president, Dr. Anthony Fauci, governors, and celebrities receiving the vaccine, there is a lot of work to be done to convince a majority of the country to get it."

Project Veritas Accuses Zuckerberg Of Violating Own Policy With Early Vaccine Concerns.

The Washington Times (2/17, Richardson, 626K) reports, "Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has banned from his social media platforms any claims that the novel coronavirus vaccine alters DNA, although he himself expressed similar concerns last year." On Tuesday, Project Veritas released video "of Mr. Zuckerberg raising questions about whether vaccines include risks of side effects such as 'modifying people's DNA and RNA' in July during a virtual Q&A meeting with staff." The Times says, "Strictly speaking, Mr. Zuckerberg did not claim that the vaccine changes DNA, but in a Nov. 30 public livestream, he was still concerned enough to raise the issue with White House coronavirus task force member Dr. Anthony Fauci." COVID-19 vaccinations "were the first mRNA vaccinations cleared by the Food and Drug Administration." In a post last reviewed November 24, the CDC said, "mRNA from the vaccine never enters the nucleus of the cell and does not affect or interact with a person's DNA."

Too High? Too Low? One Thing's For Sure: The Covid Relief Bill Is About Far More Than Covid Relief.

In an opinion piece for Forbes (2/17, 10.33M), contributor Elizabeth Bauer says "the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget has now voiced strong criticism of the" American Rescue Plan. The committee said, "Only about 1 percent of the entire package goes toward COVID vaccines, and 5 percent is truly focused on public health needs surrounding the pandemic. Meanwhile, nearly half of the package will be spent on poorly targeted rebate checks and state and local government aid, including to households and governments that have experienced little or no financial loss during this crisis." Bauer criticizes the bill, saying it "is marketed as 'covid

relief' when its provisions extend far beyond what's needed to directly alleviate financial suffering and implement needed remedies." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci is quoted.

The Myth Of 'Good Covid Vaccines' And 'Bad Covid Vaccines'.

STAT (2/17, Branswell, 262K) reports, "News coverage and social media posts about clinical trial results are creating a hierarchy of Covid vaccines in the minds of much of the public: 'good vaccines' and 'bad vaccines,'" a narrative that "health officials say is a problem." Some people may refuse a vaccine they see as less effective. The article says, "In truth, the phenomenon is already playing out, even among some who understand the caveats around when the studies were conducted and the operational benefits of these easier-to-deploy vaccines. STAT asked Emory University immunologist Rafi Ahmed if he would specify a preference should his mother ask for advice about Covid vaccines. Ahmed replied without hesitation: He'd tell her to get one of the messengerRNA, or mRNA, vaccines made by Pfizer or Moderna." The article mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Fauci: There's Evidence COVID-19 Vaccines Don't Just Protect You – They May Stop You From Spreading The Virus To Others, Too.

Hilary Brueck writes for Business Insider (2/17, 2.74M) that NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "says there's new evidence that a COVID-19 vaccine may not just protect the people who get it but also shield others whom they come in contact with."

HHS Is About To Launch A $115 Million Vaccine Education Campaign – Here Are All The Ad Agencies Benefiting From It.

Patrick Coffee and Lindsay Rittenhouse write for Business Insider (2/17, 2.74M) that "advertising giant WPP has been leading a $250 million US Department of Health and Human Services coronavirus messaging campaign." The main part of this initiative, "a $115 million-plus effort to promote the vaccines, is set to launch imminently." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

The US Isn't Prepared For A New, More Infectious Variant To Be Dominant By March – Even With Vaccinations Underway.

Aria Bendix writes for Business Insider (2/17, 2.74M) that it took only "three months for the more contagious coronavirus variant known as B.1.1.7 to become dominant in the UK. Scientists forecast a similar fate in the US." A recent analysis indicates "29 states are currently easing lockdown restrictions, while three – Iowa, Florida, and Missouri – have lifted restrictions almost entirely. Businesses are mostly open across 42 states, and 12 states have no mask requirements at all, according to a New York Times analysis." Consequently, the US is "in a precarious position from now until July, when" vaccines are expected to be widely available. The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Congress To Hold Hearing On News Media's Role In Promoting Conspiracy Theories About COVID-19 And The 2020 Election.

Charles Davis writes for Business Insider (2/17, 2.74M) that "conspiracy theories are no longer the domain of fringe websites, but have aired on major cable news networks." As a result, congressional Democrats "say they

want to examine the role that the mainstream media has played in promoting false and outlandish claims." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Christians Should Learn The Power Of 'Bite Me'.

In an opinion in the Washington Times (2/18, 626K), columnist Cheryl K. Chumley writes that patriotic American Christians "need to learn the power of the phrase 'Bite me' – and then, apply it accordingly" if they "are serious about reeling back socialism and" bringing "back individual freedoms." Chumley adds, "When globalist-minded medical bureaucrats and Microsoft-slash-self-described-philanthropists like, respectively, Dr. Anthony Fauci and Bill Gates are given wide latitude to counsel and influence the president of the United States, members of Congress, officials with the World Health Organization and United Nations, and other leaders both foreign and domestic, and convince them into shutting down economies, schools, churches and individual freedoms, all in the name of a virus – patriotic Christians need to say, 'Bite me, Fauci.' Or, 'Bite me, Bill Gates.' Or, the short-cut version, 'Bite me, globalists.'"

'Either Not Telling The Truth Or Mentally Gone': Trump Rips Biden Over Vaccine Claim.

The Daily Caller (2/17, Kruta, 375K) reports "former President Donald Trump lashed out at President Joe Biden during a Wednesday interview on Newsmax." The former president "argued that Biden was 'either not telling the truth or mentally gone' after the president appeared to claim during a CNN town hall that the coronavirus vaccine was not available before he took office in January." Trump said on Newsmax, "Well I saw that he said that there was no vaccine when he came into office. ... So he was either not telling the truth or he's mentally gone, one or the other and he's getting – actually Joe Biden is being killed on that whole thing, because even the haters said, 'Well wait a minute, you know this vaccine was announced long before,' and I believe he got the shot sometime before January twentieth." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci is mentioned.

Psaki Defends Harris 'Starting From Scratch' COVID Vaccine Remarks.

The New York Post (2/17, Bowden, 7.45M) reports that on Wednesday, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki "doubled-down on Vice President Kamala Harris' disputed claim that the new administration was 'starting from scratch' to develop a national vaccine distribution plan." She said, "I don't think most governors or most of the American people would tell you that they think it was handled effectively and efficiently by the prior administration, given we are where we are." The article mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Surprise Find In COVID-19 Brain Capillaries.

MedPage Today (2/17, George, 183K) reports, "Large cell nuclei that appeared to be megakaryocytes were found in cortical capillaries of five people who died with severe COVID-19, neuropathologists reported." The findings were reported in a JAMA Neurology research letter. Gerald Soff, MD, "hematologist with Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City, who wasn't involved with the research," said that "this atypical finding is 'extremely unanticipated and thought-evoking.'" In addition, "Avindra Nath, MD, of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke in Bethesda, Maryland, who wasn't involved with the stud," said that "while the significance of megakaryocytes in cortical capillaries is unclear, 'I am not sure that this can explain brain fog.'"

Humidity: Another Reason Face Masks May Protect Against Severe Covid-19.

In a piece for Forbes (2/17, 10.33M), senior contributor Bruce Y. Lee writes, "A face covering may be able to block at least some of the Covid-19 coronavirus from going into your nose and mouth." In addition, Lee says, "A study just published in the Biophysical Journal showed how a face covering may serve as a humidifier." The study was conducted by researchers Joseph M. Courtney and Ad Bax, PhD, from the National Institutes of Health.

All Of Us Research: Participants Are Now Getting Back Genetic Results.

The Birmingham (AL) Times (2/18, 107K) reports the NIH's "All of Us Research Program has begun to return genetic results to participants who have donated biosamples for research," which "reflects the program's priority to give back information to its research volunteers." The program "is working to build a diverse community of 1 million or more participant partners across the U.S. to help researchers learn more about how genetics, environment and lifestyle factors affect health outcomes."

RADx Expects COVID-19 Portfolio To Accelerate An Era Of At-Home Infectious Disease Testing.

GenomeWeb (2/17) reports the NIH "Rapid Acceleration of Diagnostics team has closed the submission process and earmarked $1.2 billion to support SARS-CoV-2 diagnostics from more than 40 labs and companies." The article adds, "The final RADx portfolio of products to be developed and scaled includes a diversity of diagnostics from companies such as Illumina, Quidel, Fluidigm, and Mesa Biotech, and is likely to result in a near-term manufacturing boom in rapid antigen tests and over-the-counter home-use diagnostics."

NIAID ACTIV-2 Trial Begins Phase 2/3 Testing On Four COVID-19 Therapeutics.

Homeland Preparedness News (2/17, Galford) reports, "Another four COVID-19 therapeutics for those with mild to moderate symptoms moved further up the pipeline this week, with the announcement of enrollment for Phase 2/3 testing in the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) ACTIV-2 trial." According to the article, "ACTIV-2 will involve randomized, placebo-controlled studies of Synairgen's SNG001 inhalable beta interferon, a monoclonal antibody combination from AstraZeneca known as AZD7442 and Camostat mesilate, an oral serine protease inhibitor created by Sagent Pharmaceuticals."

A Next Generation Coronavirus Vaccine Is In The Works. But Initial Funding Was Denied.

USA Today (2/17, Heath, 12.7M) reports Drew Weissman, "one of two scientists at the University of Pennsylvania behind the scientific breakthrough that enabled Moderna and Pfizer to make mRNA vaccines," and a fellow scientist have been working on a "more versatile coronavirus vaccine," but when they took a proposal for their project "to the National Institutes of Health for funding last May, they left empty-handed." The scientists "had proposed research on vaccines to protect against any variant of the virus, known as a universal or pan vaccine," but NIH staff who initially wanted to put the grant on a fast-track for approval were prevented from doing so "by negative scores from the independent scientists asked to review the grant proposal." According to Weissman, some of the reviewers "said, 'We don't need a pan coronavirus vaccine,' which is crazy."

Pfizer Says South African Variant Could Significantly Reduce Vaccine Protection.

Reuters (2/17, Erman) reports certain antibody protections created by the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine could be reduced by as much as two-thirds against the South African variant based on the results of a lab study. However, "the study found the vaccine was still able to neutralize the virus and there is not yet evidence from trials in people that the variant reduces vaccine protection."

Additional Sources. STAT (2/17, Joseph, 262K) reports, "It can be difficult to extrapolate what such lab experiments mean for what happens if someone who received the vaccine is exposed to the variant." Because COVID-19 vaccines create other antibody types and T-cells, "it's possible that overall people retain more of their defenses in fending off the virus." The article adds that the vaccines also could still protect against severe COVID-19. The findings were published Wednesday in the New England Journal of Medicine.

CNN (2/17, Sealy, Bonifield, 89.21M) reports, "Separately, a team at the National Institutes of Health and Moderna published a letter in the same journal outlining findings from an experiment they reported last month." The team "also reported a reduction in the antibody response to viruses genetically engineered to look like the B.1.351 variant – but not enough of a reduction to make the vaccine work any less effectively."

Also covering the story are Bloomberg (2/17, Kresge, Langreth, 3.57M), the Washington Post (2/18, Cunningham, Schemm, 10.52M), and the Financial Times (2/17, Kuchler, Subscription Publication, 1.48M).

SolarWinds Hacks Perpetrated From Inside U.S., White House Says.

Bloomberg (2/17, Sebenius, Leonard, 3.57M) reports, "A sprawling cyber-attack that compromised popular software created by Texas-based SolarWinds Corp. was executed from within the U.S., a top White House official said, though the government believes Russia was responsible." Wednesday, in a briefing for reporters, Deputy National Security Advisor Anne Neuberger said that "the federal investigation of the hack will take several months."

Additional Sources. The Washington Examiner (2/17, Dunleavy, 888K) reports, "It is believed that the Justice Department, State Department, Treasury Department, Energy Department, Commerce Department, National Institutes of Health, and federal court system were affected by the hack."

Dr. Moncef Slaoui Calls Out Biden For Claiming COVID Vaccine Distribution As His Administration's Own.

Fox Business (2/17, Stabile, 3.06M) reports "the Biden administration has not hesitated to take credit for coronavirus vaccine distribution in the U.S., but former Operation Warp Speed chief adviser Dr. Moncef Slaoui said Wednesday it's obvious the White House has inherited the same system from its predecessor." Slaoui said on FOX Business Network, "The plans are exactly as we put them together, to have about 200 million doses of vaccine distributed by the end of the month of March, and that's remaining the plan." Slaoui added, "What happened is, we have integrated under the operation [of] the NIH, the FDA...the CDC...the Army and private companies. ... [We], frankly, shielded ourselves from the politics, focusing on the science and generating data."

Joe Biden Should Declare A Food And Nutrition War.

In an opinion piece for The Hill (2/17, 5.69M), International Journal of Disease Reversal and Prevention associate editor Casey Means, M.D., and corporate strategy consultant Grady Means write, "It's time for

President Biden to create a National Institute for Food, Nutrition and Disease Prevention within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and make it the central scientific voice on nutrition within the government." According to Means and Means, "The largely preventable epidemics of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, stroke and cancer are not only growing, they are also creating hundreds of billions of dollars in excess American health care costs." Means and Means say, "And yet, in December, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), supported by the Department of Health and Human Services, endorsed high sugar levels in the '2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.'"

NCI Grants $1.9M To Roswell Park To Study Molecular Race-Based Breast Cancer Disparities.

GenomeWeb (2/17) reports, "The Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center said on Wednesday that the National Cancer Institute has awarded a $1.9 million grant to one of its research teams to study the role of long noncoding RNAs in race-based breast cancer disparities."

Health & Medical News

US Administering An Average Of 1.7M Vaccine Doses Per Day.

The AP (2/17) reports that the US is "vaccinating on average 1.7 million Americans per day for the coronavirus, up from under 1 million a month ago." Much of the increase, according to CDC data, "comes from people receiving their second dose of the approved vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer," and "the pace of first dose vaccinations has been largely steady over the past several weeks, hovering around an average of 900,000 shots per day."

The New York Times (2/17, Leonhardt, 20.6M) reports, "An appropriate goal, experts say, is three million shots per day – probably by April. At that pace, half of adults would receive their first shot by April and all adults who wanted a shot could receive one by June, saving thousands of lives and allowing normal life to return by midsummer."

Poll Indicates 55% Of Americans Say Teachers Should Be Vaccinated Before Schools Reopen.

Forbes (2/17, McEvoy, 10.33M) reports even as "the Biden administration is pushing to get students back in the classroom without a coronavirus vaccination requirement for teachers, most Americans believe schools should wait until all teachers are inoculated before they reopen," according to a Morning Consult/Politico poll released on Wednesday. Data show more than "half (55%) of the roughly 2,000 voters surveyed...said states should wait to reopen schools until teachers are vaccinated, while 34% said schools should open as quickly as possible regardless of teacher vaccinations."

Morning Consult (2/17, Yokley, 3K) also covers the story.

COVID-19 Vaccine Shortage Compels US Diplomats To Seek Doses From Foreign Governments.

The Washington Post (2/17, Hudson, 10.52M) reports, "U.S. diplomats serving in countries with poor medical infrastructure and high coronavirus infection rates are venting frustrations about the way top officials in

Washington are distributing the vaccines for the virus, according to meeting notes, interviews and documents obtained by The Washington Post." The shortage of COVID-19 "vaccines has forced State Department leaders to make difficult and unenviable decisions, and created humbling experiences for U.S. diplomats representing the world's wealthiest country." Some "13 foreign governments offered to inoculate U.S. officials serving abroad with their own supplies of U.S.-made Moderna and Pfizer vaccines – a gesture the State Department has already accepted, said senior U.S. officials."

Poll Finds 73% Of Americans Believe COVID-19 Vaccine Will Be Widely Available By Summer's End.

The Hill (2/17, Coleman, 5.69M) reports nearly "three-quarters of Americans said they are confident the COVID-19 vaccine will be widely available in their state by the end of the summer, according to a" Quinnipiac University poll released on Wednesday. Data show 73% "of respondents said they are very confident or somewhat confident that their state's residents will be able to get the vaccine before the end of the summer." Some 25% "of participants said they have little or no confidence that will happen."

Biden Adviser Lacks Explanation About Why California, Florida Have Similar COVID-19 Data Despite Vastly Different Policies.

On MSNBC Live (2/17, 1.26M), White House senior adviser for COVID response, Andy Slavitt, discussed why some states which did not implement lockdowns have COVID-19 data which are similar to those of other states which did. Slavitt said, "Look, there's so much of this virus that we think we understand, that we think we can predict, it's just a little beyond our explanation. What we do know is the more careful people are, the more they mask and social distance, the quicker we vaccinate, the quicker it goes away and the less it spreads. But we have to get better visibility into variants and what role they play, et cetera. But as we learned, this is a virus that continues to surprise us. It's very hard to predict. All around the country we have to continue to do a better job. I think we are but we're not done yet."

Fox News (2/17, Betz, 23.99M) reports "Slavitt appeared stumped Wednesday when asked on MSNBC to explain California and Florida's similar COVID-19 trends, despite having wildly different responses to the pandemic." In spite of "their differences in policies," the states have "shown similar COVID-19 trends – even accounting for the population difference."

The Washington Examiner (2/17, Lee, 888K) and the Daily Caller (2/17, Morefield, 375K) also cover the story.

White House Adviser Addresses Concerns About The Efficacy Of Vaccines Against Coronavirus Variants.

On CNBC (2/17, 283K), White House senior adviser for COVID response, Andy Slavitt, discussed concerns about coronavirus variants, saying, "Look, there is no question that there are variants that are coming that are making their way here into the US, and some a little bit more quickly than others. I think the news on the vaccine front on the variants has been I would say measured positive." Slavitt said "we've got a high degree of confidence that both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines work well" against B.1.1.7, "the UK strain that is here in more abundance." Both companies "are working on a plan to continually update the vaccines should there be mutations that they don't perform well on." He added that even though the vaccines are less effective against the

South African variant, they still work above the threshold necessary to create antibodies, which he concluded "is a pretty good sign to me."

CNBC (2/17, Miao, 7.34M) reports during the interview, Slavitt indicated "governors have 'difficult decisions' to make in juggling vaccine distribution for groups including seniors, nursing home workers and teachers." He stated, "We try to support them with the science the best we can, but until the shortage is resolved we're going to still have these challenges."

GOP Campaign Arm Targeting Dems Over School Reopenings In New Ad.

The Hill (2/17, Axelrod, 5.69M) reports, "The Senate Republican campaign arm is going after Democrats in new ads hitting them over school reopenings amid the coronavirus pandemic." This "new 15-second digital spot from the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) is targeting Democratic Sens. Raphael Warnock (Ga.), Mark Kelly (Ariz.), Catherine Cortez Masto (N.M.), Michael Bennet (Colo.), Tammy Duckworth (Ill.) and Maggie Hassan (N.H.), all of whom are up for reelection next year." The spot "highlights questions over the White House's plans to reopen schools, a topic where the GOP believes it can go on the offensive."

Technology, Health Experts Urge Feds To Build Working IT Systems To Handle COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution, Share Data.

FedScoop (2/17, Nyczepir) reports the US "government must build working IT systems to manage COVID-19 vaccines and share real-time data on supply and immunizations, say technology and health experts." States and localities with limited resources "didn't receive the tech they needed from the Trump administration to support vaccine rollout, according to current and former federal and state officials. States expected the federal government to provide at least one functional system for distribution, scheduling and reporting they could use." Still, "the officials say there's still time to develop such a system given the uneven vaccine rollout nationwide."

Some 130 Cancer Centers, Organizations Ask Biden To Make COVID-19 Vaccines For People With Cancer A Priority.

Contributor Victoria Forster writes in Forbes (2/17, 10.33M) that on Wednesday, "a group of 130 cancer centers and organizations, spearheaded by the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR), sent a letter to President Biden and senior members of the CDC asking them to prioritize Covid-19 vaccinations for people with cancer and cancer survivors." Growing evidence indicates "people undergoing cancer therapy are at a higher risk of severe illness and dying of Covid-19 should they contract the coronavirus." Furthermore, "people who have survived certain types of cancer such as blood cancer are also at higher risk from Covid-19, even if they have finished their treatments." The Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, Massachusetts is one of the signatories.

Commentary Warns Pandemic Will Worsen Unless US Continues To Slow The Spread Of Coronavirus.

In a New York Times (2/17, 20.6M) op-ed, Ezekiel J. Emanuel, Rick Bright and Céline Gounder, who were members of President Biden's advisory board on COVID during the transition, write that despite some recent improvements, the "Covid-19 omens are not good." They warn that "this feel-good moment is obscuring what could be a dismal spring and the potential of further lockdowns unless we can continue to slow the spread of this virus."

USAToday: Biden's Failure To Reopen Schools Shows He Has Yet To Learn Lessons About Not Following The Science.

USA Today (2/17, 12.7M) writes in an editorial that the last "year has inflicted devastating lessons on what happens when elected leaders fail to follow the science in making decisions that affect the public's well-being." Nevertheless, "the ongoing debate about whether to reopen the nation's public schools shows those lessons still haven't been adequately learned. The scientific evidence for safely reopening schools during the COVID-19 pandemic has been clear for months." The paper adds that "President Joe Biden last week backed off from his pledge to reopen most schools during his first 100 days in office. Instead, the White House set a goal of having at least 50% of schools open at least one day a week for in-person instruction."

Commentary Says Biden Is Taking Action To Ensure The Safe Reopening Of Schools.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Education for K-12 Jessica Cardichon writes in USA Today (2/17, 12.7M) that during "the first three weeks of his presidency, President Joe Biden has taken immediate action to address this crisis with a clear goal in mind: Get students back to school, in-person learning five days a week as quickly and safely as possible. This is no easy feat, but an evidence-based, urgent approach like the one we are charting can make all the difference."

Commentary Criticizes Biden About COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution, School Reopenings.

Contributor Michael Barone writes in the Washington Examiner (2/17, 888K), "You expect a certain number of stumbles from a new administration. The incoming Biden team professed dismay at its predecessor's "nonexistent" coronavirus vaccine distribution program, and this week President Biden complained of the vaccine, 'which we didn't have when I came into office.'" Biden vowed "to deliver 1 million a week," however, "there were 1.5 million vaccinations on Inauguration Day, and Biden had received two doses of vaccine – on Dec. 21 and Jan. 11. It's easier to achieve your goal if you don't set the goalposts past a mark already reached." Barone wonder if "something similar [will] work on reopening schools," or if Biden's stance will turn suburban parents against him.

Columnist Says Pandemic Is Allowing Biden To Advance A Broader Economic Agenda.

Doyle McManus writes in his Los Angeles Times (2/17, 3.37M) column that "when Joe Biden launched his campaign for the presidency in 2019, his economic proposals were relatively modest updates of the middle-class-oriented agenda he championed as vice president under Barack Obama." However, at present, "Biden's economic message, retooled to address current needs, has real urgency." McManus says the President "isn't stopping at pandemic relief. He's also using the emergency to build support for the far broader program of economic reform he adopted midway through his campaign last year, including massive investments in manufacturing, technology, education and child care."

North Dakota Detects First Two Cases Of UK Coronavirus Variant In State.

The AP (2/17) reports health "officials said Wednesday that the variant strain of the coronavirus first detected in the United Kingdom has now been confirmed in North Dakota." Health authorities "said one person had recently

returned from domestic travel before getting sick and the second person was a close contact of the first." Authorities "said one other case is suspected to be the UK variant and is currently under investigation."

The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead (ND) (2/17, Griffith, 49K) reports the infections are "the state's first two cases" of the UK variant. However, "the two people are no longer infected."

Michigan Prison Has Detected 90 Cases Of UK Coronavirus Variant.

The AP (2/17) reports 90 "cases of a COVID-19 variant believed to be more contagious have been found in inmates and staff at a western Michigan prison, and dozens of test results are pending, officials said." Daily COVID-19 "testing began at the Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility, in Ionia, after a prison employee was found to have the B.1.1.7 variant, which first emerged in the United Kingdom, officials said." Testing was conducted for 95 people, and "90 individuals – 88 of them inmates – had the variant, with the two other cases among prison employees, Michigan State Police announced Tuesday."

Wake County, North Carolina Cancels Drive-Through Vaccination Clinic Due To Ice Storm.

The Raleigh (NC) News & Observer (2/17, Sessoms, 396K) reports Wake County, North Carolina "has canceled the drive-through vaccination clinic scheduled for Thursday at PNC Arena because of the approaching ice storm and the risk of hazardous driving conditions." Wake County officials "announced that all appointments scheduled for Thursday will be moved to Monday, Feb. 22, at the arena."

New York Has Confirmed 82 Cases Of UK Coronavirus Variant, Governor Says.

The New York Post (2/17, Hogan, Musumeci, 7.45M) reports "there are now 82 confirmed cases of the highly contagious UK variant of COVID-19 in New York, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Wednesday." That number "is up by 12 since Saturday, Cuomo said on a conference call with reporters as he noted that 11 of those new cases were in New York City, while one was in Broome County."

Maryland Officials Detect Brazilian Coronavirus Variant For First Time.

The Baltimore Sun (2/17, Oxenden, 629K) reports Gov. Larry Hogan (R) "said Wednesday night that Maryland health officials have detected a new variant of the coronavirus in the state." The variant, called "P.1, is more commonly known as the Brazil variant, and first appeared in the United States at the end of January." The state's health department "confirmed the new variant with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in an adult older than 65 from the National Capital Region." The person "recently died after international travel."

CDC Report: LGBTQ People Have Higher Rates Of Underlying Health Issues That Lead To Greater COVID-19 Risks.

The Washington Post (2/17, Schmidt, 10.52M) reports that a "report the CDC released this month found that gay, lesbian and bisexual people in the United States have higher rates of self-reported underlying conditions associated with severe covid-19 outcomes, including asthma, cancer, heart disease, obesity, kidney disease and stroke, than heterosexual people." Within this community, "Black and Hispanic people are particularly vulnerable, according to the report, which relied on 2017-2019 data from a collection of population health surveys called the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System." But "as the report's authors point out, no one knows the true toll of the virus on that community – because the United States is not collecting the data necessary to study it."

Colorado Reports Fewest COVID-19 Outbreaks Since Mid-November.

The Denver Post (2/17, Wingerter, 660K) reports "Colorado had the fewest reported outbreaks of COVID-19 over the last week since mid-November, with long-term care facilities accounting for much of the decrease." The state's "Department of Public Health and Environment reported 829 COVID-19 outbreaks as of Wednesday, which was 66 fewer than the week before." However, "the number of outbreaks in schools increased by 10, to 132."

Americans Could Soon Have Ability To Choose Between Two Labeled Levels Of Mask Protection.

CNN (2/17, Enriquez, 89.21M) reports "Americans may soon be able to choose between two clearly labeled levels of face mask protection while browsing store shelves." The novel "national mask standard outlines minimum fit, design, performance and testing requirements for face masks and would require user instructions, package labeling and a permanent tag on the product." ASTM International, which is an international standards organization, "spent seven months conducting expedited testing and review and published its guidance on Tuesday." How quickly Americans "will see ASTM-labeled masks on store shelves may come down to how the standards are adopted by government agencies, such as the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and" the Occupational Health and Safety Administration.

Biden Says COVID-19 Vaccines Will Be Available To All US Residents By July.

The Intelligencer (2/17, Rosa-Acquino, 1.3M) reports "President Biden on Tuesday participated in his first televised town hall since taking office to give what can be classified as an educated guess: [COVID-19] vaccines will be available for every American by late July." That is "a change from Biden's pledge just last month, when he said everyone who wants a vaccine will be able to get one by the spring." On Tuesday, Biden "laid much of the blame for needing to push back that timeline at the feet of the Trump administration: 'Think of what we didn't do' from the time the coronavirus arrived in the United States. 'We wasted so much time.'"

Biden's Visit To Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine Plant In Michigan Postponed By One Day.

MLive (MI) (2/17, Tunison, 828K) reports President "Biden's trip to tour Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine manufacturing plant in Portage," Michigan "has been postponed a day." Late Wednesday, "Portage City Manager Joseph La Margo confirmed...that city officials were informed the visit planned for Thursday, Feb. 18 has been rescheduled for Friday." Weather was a factor "in the decision, officials said."

Commentary: Biden Has No National Plan For Vaccinating Teachers Against COVID-19.

In an opinion piece for the Washington Examiner (2/17, 888K), commentary writer Eddie Scarry says "it's nice that [President] Biden thinks teachers should receive higher priority in getting a" COVID-19 "vaccine that's in very high demand. But why isn't he doing anything about it?" Scarry asserts that "if Biden, who says he wants schools open, were to take action, he would have two options: He could either ensure that teachers receive higher priority for vaccination, or he could find a way to force them back to school without vaccination." Scarry concludes, "He has done neither. And the reason is simple. Biden has no national plan."

Editorial: Biden Administration Making School Reopenings More Difficult.

The New York Post (2/17, 7.45M) says in an editorial, "America needs its schools reopened, but President Biden and his team are making it harder even as they pretend otherwise." The Post adds, "Biden slammed President Donald Trump during the campaign for not doing more to get schools open, but the only clear goal Joe's team has offered now is actually less than the nation already has. All it offers is empty rhetoric, dodgy answers to factual questions – and policies that delay what it says it wants."

Analysis Examines Why COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Appears "Chaotic And Incomprehensible."

USA Today (2/17, Weise, 12.7M) says in an analysis, "If the COVID-19 vaccine rollout seems chaotic and incomprehensible, with numbers that don't add up and allocations that don't make sense, you're not alone. Even people who study this for a living are at a loss." USA Today poses the question, "If things appear to be on track, why is there so much chaos at the state level, with long lines, people unable to get appointments and clinics closing due to lack of vaccine?" According to the paper, "there are several reasons," and "one is a lack of federal transparency about vaccine supply and shipments and continued fluctuation of vaccine deliveries, all of which confuse and confound states."

WSJournal Says $1.9T COVID-19 Relief Plan Includes $22B Tax Hike Impacting Multinational Companies.

In an editorial, the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says the $1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief plan includes policy changes that are irrelevant to the pandemic, including a $22 billion tax hike impacting multinational companies.

Opinion: Risks Of Not Spending Enough On COVID-19 Relief More Damaging Than Spending Too Much.

In an opinion piece for the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), Alan Blinder, former vice chairman of the Federal Reserve, says the risks of not spending enough money on COVID-19 relief are more damaging and more likely than spending too much.

Neanderthal DNA May Be Linked To Lower Risk Of Severe COVID-19, Researchers Say.

The Hill (2/17, Choi, 5.69M) reports "researchers have discovered a possible genetic link between Neanderthal DNA and a lower risk of developing a severe case of the coronavirus." Researchers "found that a certain haplogroup, a population that shares common DNA, was roughly 22 percent less likely to develop a severe case of COVID-19." The "DNA is believed to have been inherited from Neanderthals." The "DNA believed to protect against illness was found on the 12th chromosome, while the DNA discovered in a previous study that researchers theorized increased the chances of severe illness was found on the third chromosome." The study was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America.

Brazilian Laboratory Says Sinovac Vaccine Is Effective Against UK, South African Variants.

Reuters (2/17, Benassatto) reports, "The COVID-19 vaccine developed by China's Sinovac Biotech is effective against the UK and South African variants, the vaccine's Brazilian partner said on Wednesday, citing test results in Chinese trials." Dimas Covas, "head of the Butantan biomedical center in Sao Paulo which [led] domestic trials of the Chinese vaccine and is supplying doses to Brazil's Health Ministry, said: 'We have tested this vaccine in China against the English and the South African variants, with good results.'" Covas "did not give any more details on exactly how effective the vaccine proved against these strains."

Zients Says J&J Has Only A Few Million Doses Of Its Experimental COVID-19 Vaccine.

Reuters (2/17, O'Donnell, Renshaw) reports the White House's COVID-19 response coordinator, Jeffrey Zients, said Wednesday that Johnson & Johnson "has only a few million doses of its experimental COVID-19 vaccine in its inventory even as likely U.S. regulatory authorization is only a few weeks away." Zients said J&J remains "committed to providing 100 million doses by June but deliveries are likely to be 'back-end loaded' as J&J works with the U.S. government to boost supply."

The New York Times (2/17, LaFraniere, 20.6M) says though the J&J vaccine "would be the third to be authorized in the United States, the nation's vaccine stock would not immediately increase. That is disappointing news for health officials and residents across the country who were hoping that another supplier would add to the 13.5 million doses a week now being delivered to states by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna."

CNBC (2/17, Lovelace, 7.34M) also reports.

Financial Analysts Suggest FDA Could Reject AstraZeneca's COVID-19 Vaccine For Efficacy, Manufacturing Process.

FiercePharma (2/17, Weintraub, 12K) reports SVB Leerink analysts sent a note to clients Wednesday suggesting the FDA may reject AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine, and that a point of "major concern" is "that AstraZeneca is manufacturing its vaccine on a 'distributed' basis, meaning it's not centralized, but spread over multiple sites and contract partners." Additionally, "for earlier published trials, AstraZeneca's vaccine was manufactured at different sites and tested at varying dosing schedules," and questions about the vaccine's efficacy remain as variants of the virus emerge around the world. The analysts suggested that the FDA "could very well decide not to clear a sub-par vaccine, even though the demand for vaccination is far outstripping the supply of the two mRNA vaccines on the market, from Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech."

Cuba's Sovereign 2 Vaccine Nearing Final Trials.

The New York Times (2/17, Augustin, Kitroeff, 20.6M) reports, "The Cuban government says it is on the brink of an extraordinary scientific achievement: the mass production of a coronavirus vaccine invented on the island." The Sovereign 2, "one of the four vaccines developed by Cuban scientists," is expected to "enter a final phase of testing next month, a crucial step toward regulatory approval that, if successful, could put the island on the path to inoculate its entire population and begin exports abroad by year's end." The article adds that a safe and effective homegrown vaccine "would hand the Cuban government a significant political victory – and a shot at rescuing the nation from economic ruin."

One-Third Of Military Service Members Have Chosen Not To Receive COVID-19 Vaccinations, Pentagon Officials Say.

CNN (2/17, Kaufman, Liebermann, 89.21M) reports that a third of US military service members "eligible to receive a Covid-19 vaccination have opted not to, defense officials said Monday as they announced the Department of Defense is nearing 1 million vaccinations delivered." Cautioning "that it's still 'very early data,' Maj. Gen. Jeff Taliaferro, vice director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the House Armed Services Committee Wednesday, 'The vaccine is the right thing to do, it's clearly safe for service members.'" The percentage of those "who have decided not to receive a vaccine mirrors the acceptance rate across the United States, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Wednesday."

The Washington Post (2/17, Horton, 10.52M) reports, "The military mandates that service members receive a variety of vaccinations at enlistment, and often additional inoculations are required before deployments for typhoid, polio and other diseases." However, "the emergency use authorizations for the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccines prevent commanders from requiring their use without Food and Drug Administration approval, Taliaferro said."

Among other sources covering the story are Bloomberg (2/17, Tiron, 3.57M), the AP (2/17, Baldor), Politico (2/17, O'Brien, 6.73M), and the Washington Times (2/17, Glenn, 626K).

Native Americans Embrace COVID-19 Vaccine In Greater Numbers Than Other Minority Communities.

The AP (2/17, Morgan) reports that while US minority communities have demonstrated distrust of COVID-19 vaccines, "the opposite is true for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, a Native American tribe of 16,000 in western North Carolina, and other tribes across the country, which were also quick to adopt coronavirus prevention measures." The "Indian Health Service said Tuesday that it has administered nearly 385,300 doses of COVID-19 vaccines." The article adds, "At a rate of about 18,490 per 100,000, that's higher than all but five U.S. states, according to an AP analysis of federal data."

Israeli Healthcare Provider Finds Pfizer Vaccine Was 95% Effective Against COVID-19 In Large Trial.

Reuters (2/17, Ayyub) reports Israel-based HMO Maccabi "said on Wednesday that Pfizer Inc's COVID-19 vaccine was 95% effective in a trial of 602,000 people, reinforcing the drugmaker's efficacy findings." The healthcare provider "said in a statement that only 608 people had tested positive for COVID-19 more than a week after receiving the second of two required Pfizer doses." In comparison, 20,621 out of a group "of 528,000 Israelis with similar backgrounds who did not receive the vaccine" tested positive.

Opinion: Pharmacies Are Vital To American COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout, But They Can Do More.

In an opinion in Bloomberg (2/17, 3.57M), contributors Scott Duke Kominers and Alex Tabarrok write that the involvement of pharmacies in America's COVID-19 vaccine rollout is "already driving improvements in the distribution of shots in the U.S." They explain, "Several states already rely on pharmacies to deliver most flu vaccines," and West Virginia, which has "the fastest and most complete Covid-19 vaccination record thus far, has used local pharmacies to deliver vaccines more than any other state – pioneering a combination approach in which the National Guard coordinates logistics while local pharmacies do the injections." However, they add, "because pharmacies, especially the smaller pharmacies, are not currently being used at maximum capacity to

deliver the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, offering the Oxford-AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson vaccines more broadly through pharmacies would make it possible to add untapped, efficient capacity directly."

Many Americans Reportedly Experiencing "Vaccine Envy" As They Wait Their Turn For COVID-19 Vaccine.

USA Today (2/17, Dastagir, 12.7M) reports, "Public health officials warned it would take time to vaccinate everyone" against COVID-19 "who desired it." However, "most people...likely couldn't prepare for the feeling of watching as some people near a return to normal, while they continue to wait." The article examines the feelings of "vaccine envy" many Americans are experiencing as they watch others receive doses ahead of them.

COVID-19 Infection Rates Among People Who Received Moderna, Pfizer Vaccines Were Almost 89% Lower, Large-Scale Study Suggests.

Bloomberg (2/17, Langreth, 3.57M) reports a large-scale study has found that "COVID infection rates were almost 89% lower in people who received two doses of the Moderna Inc. or Pfizer Inc.-BioNTech SE vaccines, starting 36 days after their first shot." The report "used artificial intelligence software to scan the medical records of" 31,000 "early vaccine recipients at Mayo Clinic facilities" in four states. The article adds, "The findings are important because vaccine and drug efficacy in the real world often differs from what is seen in the carefully controlled environment of experimental clinical trials."

Winter Weather Delays Delivery Of COVID-19 Vaccines Across The US.

CNN (2/17, Croft, Gumbrecht, Sanchez, 89.21M) reports, "Severe weather around the United States will delay Covid-19 vaccine deliveries in the coming days, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Wednesday." FedEx and UPS said they have contingency plans in place; however, these delays could last up to two weeks.

Newsweek (2/17, Kim, 2.67M) reports on multiple states' reactions to the winter weather and how each state plans to alter its vaccine rollout.

Among other news outlets covering the story are US News & World Report (2/17, Smith-Schoenwalder, 1.91M), the AP (2/17, Noveck, Naishadham), ABC World News Tonight (2/17, Muir, 7.78M), CBS Evening News (2/17, O'Donnell, 5.7M), and NBC Nightly News (2/17, Holt, 8.26M).

New York Governor Accused Of Threatening Assemblyman Who Criticized Him.

USA Today (2/17, Campbell, 12.7M) reports, "New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo [D] launched into a heated criticism Wednesday of one of the most vocal critics of his COVID-19 nursing home policies, state assemblyman [Ron Kim (D)] who claims the governor threatened to 'destroy' him on a private phone call."

The New York Times (2/17, Ferré-Sadurní, McKinley, 20.6M) says the governor "was angered and combative about a letter published by The New York Post that was signed by several Assembly members, including Mr. Kim." The letter cited Cuomo's "delays in releasing a complete tally of deaths of nursing home residents...[and] accused Mr. Cuomo of attempting to circumvent a federal probe and 'intentional obstruction of justice.'"

According to CNN (2/17, Lee, Morales, 89.21M), Cuomo's senior adviser Rich Azzopardi said, "Kim's assertion that the governor said he would 'destroy him' is false."

Other news outlets covering the story include The Hill (2/17, Choi, 5.69M), National Review (2/17, Evans, 798K), Politico New York (2/17, Young), the AP (2/17, Villeneuve), Bloomberg (2/17, Clukey, Braun, 3.57M), the Washington Post (2/17, Bump, 10.52M), Forbes (2/17, Walsh, 10.33M), and the Intelligencer (2/17, Prater, 1.3M).

FBI, US Attorney Investigating New York Governor's Handling Of Nursing Homes During The COVID-19 Pandemic.

The New York Times (2/17, A1, McKinley, Ferré-Sadurní, 20.6M) reports, "The Democratic leaders of the New York State Senate are moving to strip Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of unilateral emergency powers granted during the pandemic, setting up a remarkable rebuke for the governor from members of his own party." These proposals, "which could be voted on as soon as next week, underscore the deepening division between Mr. Cuomo and state lawmakers since the governor admitted to intentionally withholding critical data on virus-related deaths from the Legislature." Meanwhile, it has "emerged that the F.B.I. and the U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of New York had opened an inquiry into the Cuomo administration's handling of nursing homes during the pandemic."

The New York Post (2/17, Garger, Celona, Hicks, 7.45M) reports this investigation "is examining the Cuomo administration's actions relating to the nursing homes and other long-term care facilities after thousands of their residents died of COVID-19, according to two sources familiar with the matter." According to The Times Union, the probe, for now, "is focusing on some senior members of Cuomo's coronavirus task force."

Among other news outlets covering the story are The Hill (2/17, Budryk, 5.69M), the New York Daily News (2/17, Slattery, 2.51M) and the Wall Street Journal (2/18, Vielkind, Subscription Publication, 8.41M).

Opinion: New York Governor's Actions Worse Than A Coverup.

In an opinion piece for the Washington Post (2/17, 10.52M), columnist Marc Thiessen says New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) "is under bipartisan fire after an aide admitted that his administration deliberately delayed releasing information showing the true extent of covid-19 deaths in New York nursing homes." Thiessen argues, "Stonewalling the Justice Department is bad enough, but Cuomo did something even worse: His administration provided inaccurate data to public health officials." He concludes, "Cuomo's actions certainly merit his removal from office – not just for the coverup, but for the actions he took that impeded our national response to the worst pandemic in American history."

Opinion: New Yorkers Living In Discouraging Reality Under Gov. Cuomo.

In an opinion piece for the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), Daniel Henninger expresses his dissatisfaction with New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's (D) management of the COVID-19 pandemic and discusses what life is like for New Yorkers.

New York To Reopen Indoor Family Entertainment, Outdoor Amusement Parks.

CNBC (2/17, Higgins-Dunn, 7.34M) reports, "New York is forging ahead with reopening more businesses amid a post-holiday decline in Covid-19 cases, but the governor said the state is keeping 'one eye' on troublesome variants of the virus that could reverse its progress." On Wednesday, Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) announced "indoor family entertainment centers, such as arcades, trampoline parks and laser tag facilities, will be allowed to

reopen starting March 26 at 25% capacity with additional precautions," and "outdoor amusement parks can reopen on April 9 at 33% capacity."

Nebraska Likely To Receive More Than 60K COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.

The AP (2/17) reports, "Nebraska is likely to receive more than 60,000 doses of coronavirus vaccines this week." The state "is focusing most of its vaccination efforts on residents who are at least 65 years old," but "Gov. Pete Ricketts [R] said his administration has also directed local public health agencies to give priority to first responders, law enforcement, correctional workers, and people who work on public utilities, among others."

LA County Elementary Schools Allowed To Reopen, But Return To Class Will Be Uneven.

The Los Angeles Times (2/17, Newberry, 3.37M) reports that while coronavirus rates in Los Angeles County "have finally dropped low enough to allow for the immediate reopening of elementary schools," there will be "an uneven return to class." The Times adds, "Smaller school systems in more prosperous communities...appear poised to quickly expand in-person instruction." Larger districts and those serving low-income areas, however, have "concerns about vaccinations for school staff and community anxiety over health risks are making for harder decisions."

LATimes: LA Unified School District Superintendent Needs To Demand Teachers Return To Classrooms.

An editorial in the Los Angeles Times (2/17, 3.37M) says, "Supt. Austin Beutner, who has been struggling with a teachers union unwilling to send educators back into classrooms, couldn't have opened the schools [in Los Angeles county] anyway because the county's infection rate was too high to meet the state's stringent standards." However, this week, rates "fell to the point where it is officially safe for all elementary schools in the county to open." The Times adds the Los Angeles Unified School District superintendent "needs to put on his big-boy pants, reopen schools and demand that teachers return or risk their jobs."

California's COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Does Not Prioritize Some Essential Workers.

The Los Angeles Times (2/17, Castillo, 3.37M) reports, "Millions of front-line workers in California are falling through the cracks of an undersupplied COVID-19 vaccine distribution system, putting entire communities at prolonged risk of illness." California "has prioritized some essential workers for vaccines," but Phase 1B does not include "high-risk workers at farms, restaurants and grocery stores."

First Two FEMA Mass COVID-19 Vaccination Sites Open In California.

The Hill (2/17, Sullivan, 5.69M) reports, "The first two mass vaccination sites run by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) opened Tuesday in California." They are located at the Oakland-Alameda Coliseum and California State University Los Angeles.

North Carolina Alters COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Guidance, Making It Permissible To Refuse COVID-19 Vaccine To Travelers.

The AP (2/17, Anderson) reports North Carolina is changing "its vaccine distribution guidance to dissuade people from traveling long distances to receive a COVID-19 shot in the state." The state DHHS said, "To promote the

public health goals for North Carolina, it is permissible to not offer vaccine to temporary travelers who do not reside, work, or spend significant time in the North Carolina."

Michigan Restaurants Propose Tying Indoor Capacity Limits To COVID-19 Positivity Rate.

The AP (2/17, Eggert) reports, "Michigan restaurants on Wednesday proposed tying indoor capacity limits to the percentage of COVID-19 tests that come back positive, contending that clear guideposts would help the hospitality industry navigate the pandemic." However, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D) "has opposed linking coronavirus metrics to the automatic loosening or tightening of restrictions."

Other news outlets covering the story include the Detroit Free Press (2/17, Selasky, 2.16M), the Detroit News (2/17, Mauger, 1.16M) and MLive (MI) (2/17, DesOrmeau, 828K).

More Than 100K COVID-19 Vaccine Appointments Delayed In Pennsylvania.

The Allentown (PA) Morning Call (2/17, Turner, 460K) reports, "Problems in Pennsylvania's rollout of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine have caused shortages, prompting a shake-up in scheduling that could delay shots for more than 100,000 people, a top state official said Wednesday."

Massachusetts Residents Aged 65-74, Those With Underlying Health Conditions Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine.

The AP (2/17) reports that on Wednesday, Massachusetts health officials said people aged 65 and older are now eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. Residents with more than one underlying medical condition can also register for inoculation.

According to the Boston Globe (2/17, Weisman, Pan, Andersen, Lazar, 1.04M), underlying conditions include asthma, "cancer; chronic kidney disease; chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; Down syndrome; heart conditions, such as heart failure and coronary artery disease; being immunocompromised; pregnancy; sickle cell disease; obesity; smoking; and type 2 diabetes."

The Boston Herald (2/17, Tiernan, 327K) and the Cape Cod (MA) Times (2/17, McCormick, 64K) also report.

Massachusetts Legislators To Hold Oversight Hearings On State's COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.

The Boston Herald (2/17, Tiernan, 327K) reports Massachusetts legislators "will hold a series of oversight hearings on the state's 'constantly changing and confusing vaccination roll out.'" The article adds, "The newly-created Joint Committee on Covid-19 and Emergency Preparedness and Management will hold its first hearing on Feb. 25."

Colorado Governor Will Not Allow Denver Mayor To Administer COVID-19 Vaccine To Homeless Ahead Of Schedule.

The Denver Post (2/17, Swanson, 660K) reports Denver Mayor Michael Hancock (D) would like to deviate from Colorado's "state-mandated [COVID-19] vaccine priority list" and inoculate the city's homeless population. However, Gov. Jared Polis (D) will not grant the mayor authority to do so ahead of schedule.

More Than 695K Minnesotans Have Received The COVID-19 Vaccine.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune (2/17, Olson, 855K) reports, "More than 695,000 people in Minnesota have received COVID-19 vaccine, according to the latest state figures on Wednesday, including nearly 25% of teachers and 40% of senior citizens."

Minnesota Governor Wants All Schools To Offer Some Form Of In-Person Learning By March 8.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune (2/17, Golden, Olson, 855K) reports that on Wednesday, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz (DFL) said all schools throughout the state "should offer some form of in-person instruction by March 8." He "said he's confident Minnesota is ready to reopen classrooms because it has developed and invested in the kind of efforts needed to operate schools in a pandemic."

New Jersey Governor Extends Public-Health Emergency To Mid-March.

NJ News (2/17, Johnson, 1.47M) reports Gov. Phil Murphy (D) "extended New Jersey's public-health emergency over the coronavirus pandemic for a 12th time." The executive order "extends the declaration until at least mid-March."

Error Causes Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine Shortage In Pennsylvania.

The AP (2/17, Rubinkam) reports, "Pennsylvania is facing a temporary shortage of booster shots of the Moderna vaccine because providers inadvertently used them as first doses, setting back the state's already stumbling vaccine rollout." According to acting Health Secretary Alison Beam, some "30,000 to 60,000 appointments for the COVID-19 booster shot will need to be pushed back by one or two weeks."

The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review (2/17, Guza, 245K) and the Reading (PA) Eagle (2/17, Hasty, 119K) also report.

Editorial: California Governor Turns To Corporate Contacts To Roll Out COVID-19 Vaccine.

In an editorial, the San Francisco Chronicle (2/17, 2.44M) says, "Gov. Gavin Newsom [D] has fallen back on a favorite strategy to address California's rickety vaccination effort: a pair of highly touted, reluctantly disclosed corporate contracts." The state will partner with Blue Shield and Kaiser Permanente to roll out the COVID-19 vaccine. The Chronicle adds, "There is a familiar and troubling appearance of coziness about the contracts, which were granted on an emergency basis without the benefit – or hindrance, depending on one's perspective – of a bidding process."

Colorado Governor Urges Congress To Take Action On COVID-19 Stimulus Plan.

The AP (2/17, Nieberg) reports, "Colorado Gov. Jared Polis [D] urged lawmakers Wednesday to take quick action on a $1 billion-plus stimulus plan [and] lower taxes to jump-start the economy."

Iowa Cancels Deal With Microsoft To Develop Centralized System For COVID-19 Vaccine Scheduling.

The AP (2/17, Pitt) reports on Wednesday, officials in Iowa "said they have cancelled a deal with Microsoft Corp. to develop a centralized online system." Gov. Kim Reynolds (R) said, "When we dug into what the options were and what was available and the timeline to get that done it just didn't make sense for us to move forward, especially with the registration and scheduling component." She did not offer further details.

Detroiters Aged 60-64 With Chronic Medical Conditions Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine.

The Detroit Free Press (2/17, Hall, 2.16M) reports that on Wednesday, Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan (D) announced "Detroiters age[d] 60 and older with chronic medical conditions...are now eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine."

The Detroit News (2/17, Rahal, 1.16M) says, "Residents who qualify include those with cancer, asthma, heart conditions, hypertension, diabetes, cerebrovascular disease, chronic kidney disease, pulmonary fibrosis, cardiomyopathy, HIV, liver disease, coronary artery disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cystic fibrosis, dementia, sickle cell disease and Alzheimer's disease."

Crain's Detroit Business (2/17, Frank, 84K) also reports.

Connecticut Legislators Conclude 24-Hour Hearing On Vaccination Rules For Public School Children.

The Hartford (CT) Courant (2/17, Altimari, 438K) reports that around 9 a.m. on Wednesday, Connecticut legislators concluded a 24-hour public hearing focused on vaccination rules for public school children. Under current law, parents can raise religious objections to "bypass the requirement that children must be inoculated against...highly contagious preventable diseases before enrolling in school." However, proposed legislation "would eliminate the religious exemption and bar unvaccinated children from public schools."

Soft Launch Of Nevada's New COVID-19 Vaccine Appointment Registration System To Occur Next Week.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal (2/17, Davidson, 372K) reports, "Nevada is on the cusp of launching a statewide COVID-19 vaccine appointment registration system, with a soft launch planned in Clark County next week." It is expected to replace individual systems used by local governments, but will not be required. DHHS confirmed it is "a voluntary program."

Californians With Low Incomes To Receive $600 Stimulus Payment Under $9.6B COVID-19 Economic Recovery Package.

The Los Angeles Times (2/17, McGreevy, 3.37M) reports California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) and legislative leaders announced a $600 state stimulus payment will be issued to low-income residents. It is "part of a $9.6-billion [COVID-19] economic recovery package."

According to the AP (2/17, Ronayne, Thompson), "About 5.7 million people who earn less than $30,000 per year would get one-time payments."

USA Today (2/17, Gieseke, 12.7M) reports the recovery package allocates "$2.1 billion in grants for small businesses."

The San Francisco Chronicle (2/17, Koseff, 2.44M) also reports.

Op-Ed: Los Angeles' Distribution Of COVID-19 Vaccines A "Confusing" Process.

In an op-ed for the Los Angeles Times (2/17, 3.37M), executive administrator of Continuum of Care Operations and Value Improvement at Keck Medicine of USC Felipe Osorno says, "While Los Angeles may be breathing easier with the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines, many of us have been dismayed by what can be a confusing distribution process." Since he oversees vaccination efforts at Keck Medicine, Osorno created "a wish list of potential improvements" to the vaccine distribution process.

Florida Governor Defends Controversial COVID-19 Pop-Up Vaccination Clinic In Affluent Community.

CNN (2/17, Toropin, 89.21M) reports Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) "has threatened to move a pop-up vaccination clinic that his state has set up in an affluent community in Manatee County after he was confronted with allegations of political favoritism and preference for the wealthy at a news conference Wednesday." DeSantis said, "It wasn't a choice about zip codes, it was a choice about where's a high concentration of seniors where you could have communities provide the ability for them to go on (to get vaccinated). ... If Manatee County doesn't like us doing this, then we are totally fine with putting this in counties that want it."

The Hill (2/17, Gstalter, 5.69M) and Politico (2/17, Sarkissian, Dixon, 6.73M) also report.

Maine AG Issues Warning Against Administering COVID-19 Vaccine To Ineligible People.

The AP (2/16) reports Maine's Attorney General Aaron Frey (D) "has issued a warning to health care providers in the state against administering COVID-19 vaccines to ineligible people." The warning is "in response to reports of improper administration of the vaccines."

Chicago Spent $281.5M Of $1.2B COVID-19 Pandemic Relief Money On Police Department.

The AP (2/17) says, "Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot [D] spent millions of dollars in federal COVID-19 relief money on the personnel costs for the police department." The article says according to the Chicago Tribune, "of the $1.2 billion Chicago received from the federal government to help plug budget holes caused the drop of revenue due to the pandemic, $281.5 million went to the Chicago Police Department."

California Fines McDonald's Franchisee For Firing Workers Who Raise COVID-19 Safety Concerns.

The Los Angeles Times (2/17, Miller, 3.37M) reports, "The California Labor Commissioner has fined a McDonald's franchisee for firing four employees who participated in strikes to protest coronavirus safety conditions in their Los Angeles workplace."

Nevadans Aged 65-69 Eligible For COVID-19 Vaccine Next Week.

The AP (2/17, Metz) reports that beginning next week, Nevadans aged 65-69 will be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine.

Ohio Senate Passes Bill To Limit Governor's Health Orders.

The AP (2/17, Amiri) reports, "A small committee of legislators could overrule the Ohio governor's health orders under a bill the state Senate approved Wednesday." The proposed legislation "would create a committee that would have the power to rescind executive actions taken by any governor or state health department through a concurrent resolution, which requires a simple majority from the House and Senate."

NYC Fixing COVID-19 Vaccine Registration System.

The New York Post (2/17, Hicks, 7.45M) reports New York City officials "said...they are finally creating a single website where New Yorkers can book appointments for COVID-19 vaccines at all city-run locations." The website "is currently being used by the city Health Department's 15 vaccine distribution sites at high school campuses – and will soon add two more new mass vaccination sites to its roster."

Cannabis Workers, Veterinarians Receive Top Priority For COVID-19 Vaccine In California.

The San Francisco Chronicle (2/17, Williams, 2.44M) reports, "Medical marijuana workers now have priority access to the coronavirus vaccine, under revised California guidelines." Some medical cannabis workers are in the "top slot – known as 1a – of vaccination priorities," putting them in the same category as front line medical workers. The new guidelines also included "veterinary services employees in Phase 1b, Tier 1."

Leaders In DC Area Begin Lifting Some COVID-19 Restrictions.

The Washington Post (2/17, Zauzmer, Schneider, 10.52M) reports, "Leaders in Maryland and Virginia eased up on some pandemic-related restrictions Wednesday as the rate of new coronavirus infections continued to fall from its winter peak." Additionally, DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson (D) asked "the city's health department to consider loosening restrictions on youth sports."

Biden's Openness On Minimum Wage Negotiations May Not Please Progressives.

The Washington Post (2/17, Alemany, Raji, 10.52M) reports that President Biden's "road to the White House was paved in part with a pledge to increase the national minimum wage to $15 an hour. At his first official 2020 campaign event, Biden called for the hike in front of crowded union hall in Pittsburgh." The majority of Democrats "rallied around the idea of including the $15 minimum wage in Biden's $1.9 trillion coronavirus stimulus package, before he suggested it might not survive the budget reconciliation process and might need to be a stand-alone measure." And Biden "signaled during a CNN town hall last night in Wisconsin he is open to negotiating a longer phase-in for the hike, explaining a lower number like $12 to $13 an hour 'could be beneficial while having less potential impact on business owners,' per my colleague Erica Werner."

Debate Over Whether $15 Minimum Wage Would Boost Workers Or Kill Jobs Rages.

The AP (2/17, Wiseman) reports, "Will the Biden administration succeed in enacting a much higher federal minimum wage – and should it?" The Administration "has cast its campaign to raise the minimum as a way to lift up millions of the working poor, reduce America's vast financial inequality and help boost the economy." Yet "just this month, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated that while raising the minimum wage to $15 by 2025 would increase pay for 17 million people and pull 900,000 out of poverty, it would also end 1.4 million jobs."

Consumers Used Stimulus Checks To Boost Economy, Retail Spending In January.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Torry, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that American consumers boosted the US economy by spending their stimulus checks, sending retail spending to its biggest increase in seven months in January. Retail sales jumped a seasonally adjusted 5.3% in January from the previous month, as manufacturing output rose to pre-pandemic levels.

Millions Of US Jobs Unlikely To Come Back After Pandemic, Economists Warn.

The Washington Post (2/17, Long, 10.52M) reports, "Millions of jobs that have been shortchanged or wiped out entirely by the coronavirus pandemic are unlikely to come back, economists warn, setting up a massive need for career changes and retraining in the United States." The coronavirus pandemic "has triggered permanent shifts in how and where people work." Businesses "are planning for a future where more people are working from home, traveling less for business, or replacing workers with robots." All of these changes "mean many workers will not be able to do the same job they did before the pandemic, even after much of the U.S. population gets vaccinated against the deadly virus."

As Democrats Work To Pass Virus Relief, Divisions Appear On Next Legislative Package.

The Washington Post (2/17, Werner, Stein, Grandoni, 10.52M) reports, "Even as President Biden and congressional Democrats work to pass their $1.9 trillion coronavirus relief bill, they're bracing for the next big legislative scramble, over another massive spending bill that's already drawing intense lobbying and threatening Democratic unity." Biden's next package "could be far pricier than the coronavirus bill." Although plans "remain fluid, it's expected to center on a major infrastructure investment, while also tackling other priorities such as clean energy, domestic manufacturing, and child and elder care."

Democrats Face Internal Clash Over Raising Minimum Wage.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Duehren, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that Democrats are preparing for an internecine battle over increasing the minimum wage to $15 per hour. President Biden's coronavirus stimulus proposes to accomplish that goal by 2025, but it is opposed by some Democratic lawmakers. Democrats must remain unanimous in the 50-50 Senate to pass legislation. The Los Angeles Times (2/17, Haberkorn, 3.37M) reports that progressives, "who have long rallied for the policy, say it would help stimulate an economy hampered by the pandemic." They "view the bill as the best vehicle to get the wage increase passed into law." Biden "supports the goal, but is pumping the brakes on whether it should be part of the stimulus package." For starters, Biden, "a pragmatist who spent decades in the Senate, worries a minimum-wage hike provision will be deemed inappropriate under the special reconciliation process that Democrats are using to pass the bill."

Allies Creating Nonprofit Group To Push Bidens' Agenda.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Day, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports allies of President Biden "are preparing to create a new nonprofit advocacy organization, with the White House's approval, that will be funded by donors and seek to build support for his policy agenda, senior administration officials said." The group, "whose working name is 'Building Back Together,' is expected to run advertisements promoting the president's

policies and coordinate with existing nonprofit advocacy organizations on issues such as Covid-19, climate change and the economy."

Opinion: Debate Over Pandemic Relief Ignoring Shifting Of Jobs From One Sector To Another.

In an article for Bloomberg Opinion (2/17), columnist Peter R. Orszag writes, "The debate in Congress over pandemic relief is overlooking something crucial: the shifting of jobs from one sector to another that is to be expected after the health crisis ends. This coming reallocation in the economy adds to the arguments in favor of spending $1.9 trillion on pandemic relief." Orszag argues, "Basically, when economic turmoil is rising under the surface – as some companies contract sharply and others expand quickly – a larger relief package is helpful, as long as its provisions don't freeze-frame the past. As lawmakers debate the size of the legislation in the coming days and weeks, they should keep in mind the reallocation shock that's embodied in the pandemic."

Opinion: Biden Relief Package Would Give Congress Time To Work On Longer-Term Answer To Health Insurance.

In an opinion piece for the Los Angeles Times (2/17, 3.37M), Deputy Editorial Page Editor Jon Healey writes, "On the campaign trail, Joe Biden pledged to use the Affordable Care Act as a foundation for extending health insurance to all Americans. And in his first major legislative proposal – a $1.9-trillion COVID-19 relief package – Biden is trying to take the first steps in that direction." Healey writes, "Biden's proposal...would provide larger premium subsidies for two years to the vast majority of people who buy coverage through the state Obamacare exchanges." Healey argues, "The COVID relief bill would buy Congress time to work on a longer-term answer... . At some point, however, they are going to have to grapple with the incessant increase in healthcare spending, or live with the consequences of healthcare bills consuming a larger and larger share of the economy, crowding out potentially more productive uses of our dollars."

IRS: Some Stimulus Checks May Still Be In The Mail.

USA Today (2/17, Collins, 12.7M) reports that the IRS "announced this week that the federal government has distributed all stimulus checks it is legally permitted to issue under two laws passed last year by Congress and signed by former President Donald Trump to provide a cash infusion for Americans recovering from the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic." The agency "said all payments have been delivered based on the information it has on file for those who are eligible, but it stressed that some checks may still be in the mail." Some "13 million checks were mistakenly sent to bank accounts or addresses that are no longer valid and had to be redirected."

Biden's COVID-19 Relief Legislation Is Also An ACA Expansion Bill.

Vox (2/17, Scott, 1.88M) reports that the Covid-19 relief package "proposed by President Joe Biden and being considered by Democrats in Congress could expand health care coverage to millions of people, the most significant step in the last 10 years toward patching up some of the holes in the Affordable Care Act." The ACA "led to a historically low uninsured rate in the US – 8.6 percent in 2016 – but the number of uninsured Americans started ticking up again during the Trump administration, rising to 9.2 percent by 2019." Then "millions of people lost their insurance (along with their jobs) during the coronavirus pandemic."

Proposals Could Result In Universal Basic Income For Kids In US.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Ip, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that both President Biden and Sen. Mitt Romney (R-UT) have proposed strongly expanding the child tax credit in ways that essentially create a near-universal basic income for children. Both men aim to reduce child poverty, and their proposals would cut that number by about 3 million.

COVID-19 Vaccine Collaboration Illustrates Potential Of Public-Private Partnerships, Teva Executive Says.

In an opinion piece for the Morning Consult (2/17, Baeder, 3K), Christine Baeder, SVP and chief operating officer for US Generics at Teva Pharmaceuticals, writes that the rapid arrival of COVID-19 vaccines illustrates "public-private success from which FDA and the generic pharmaceutical industry can take lessons to accomplish other pivotal public health goals." In particular, she says "one imminent opportunity is ensuring the timely approval of generic versions of complex medicines – therapies which include auto-injectors like EpiPen and inhalers used to treat asthma – that are critical to the care of many serious and chronic medical conditions."

HHS Signs Contract For Special Syringes To Extract Six Doses Of Pfizer Vaccine.

Politico (2/17, Cancryn, Luthi, Ehley, Lim, Ollstein, 6.73M) reports that HHS "signed a five-month, $54.2 million deal with Retractable Technologies for extra-efficient syringes necessary to extract six doses of Pfizer's Covid vaccine from what were originally labeled five-dose vials." The contract, "disclosed in a Securities and Exchange Commission filing Tuesday, allows the federal government to exercise up to seven one-month extensions, for a maximum cost of about $93 million."

Developing Countries Falling Dangerously Behind On COVID-19 Vaccinations.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Shah, Steinhauser, Solomon, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that less developed countries are now falling dangerously behind COVID-9 vaccination goals as more variants spread, making it even harder to catch up.

HuffPost (2/17, 363K) reports similarly.

Federal Mask Mandate "Comes Far Too Late," Contributor Says.

In a piece for Forbes (2/17, Haseltine, 10.33M), contributor William A. Haseltine writes, "As part of the Biden administration's plan to combat Covid-19, an executive order was released on January 20th 'with the goal of maximizing public compliance with, and addressing any obstacles to, mask-wearing and other public health best practices identified by CDC.'" According to Haseltine, "The federal mask mandate is a step in the right direction but one that comes far too late, with the virus already having taken nearly half a million American lives."

Federal Agents Have Seized More Than 10M Fake N95 Masks In Recent Weeks.

The AP (2/17, Long) reports, "Federal agents have seized more than 10 million fake 3M brand N95 masks in recent weeks, the result of an ongoing investigation into counterfeits sold in at least five states to hospitals, medical facilities and government agencies." According to the AP, "3M, based in Maplewood, Minnesota, is among the largest global producers of the N95 mask, which has been approved by the U.S. National Institute for

Occupational Safety and Health." Throughout "the pandemic Homeland Security Investigations has used its 7,000 agents, along with border officials, the Food and Drug Administration and the FBI, to investigate the scams, seizing $33 million in phony products and arresting more than 200 people."

Also reporting are Fox News (2/17, Farber, 23.99M), The Hill (2/17, 5.69M), ABC World News Tonight (2/17, story 5, 2:15, Muir, 7.78M), CBS Evening News (2/17, story 6, 1:50, O'Donnell, 4.82M), and the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Hayashi, Subscription Publication, 8.41M).

COVID-19 Vaccines Have Potential To "Decimate" Demand For Testing.

Bloomberg (2/17, Court, 3.57M) reports COVID-19 testing companies "saw their stocks surge as Covid-19 testing became a key line of defense against the pathogen that's killed almost half a million Americans." HOwever, "vaccines have the potential to decimate demand for diagnostics."

Opinion: Pandemic Has Made The Goal Of Individualized Education Easier To Achieve.

In an opinion piece for USA Today (2/17, Khan, Hooks, Contributors, 12.7M), Khan Academy founder and CEO Sal Khan and Stand Together CEO Brian Hooks ask, "What would it take to enable every student the opportunity for an education tailored to them – individualized education at a mass scale?" Hooks and Khan say, "Interestingly, the disruption caused by the pandemic has made this goal easier to achieve across the entire educational ecosystem." Khan and Hooks add, "Now is the time to build a better education system, one that empowers and uplifts every student at every stage of life. Achieving this goal requires the collaboration of educators, parents, philanthropists, businesses and policymakers alike who will focus on helping students receive a quality, individualized education no matter the setting."

Many Americans Expect Coronavirus Disruptions To Last Into Second Half Of 2021, Poll Indicates.

The Hill (2/17, 5.69M) reports, "A majority of Americans expect coronavirus disruptions to linger into the second half of 2021, according to a Gallup poll released on Wednesday." This "survey found that 53 percent of adults expect disruptions due to COVID-19 to continue past the middle of 2021, up from 33 percent who said the same in mid-December."

Mental Health Providers Stretched Thin As Demand For Services Surges.

The New York Times (2/17, Caron, 20.6M) reports, "Since the first coronavirus case was confirmed in the United States more than a year ago, the number of people in need of mental health services has surged." However, "many say that they are languishing on waiting lists, making call after call only to be turned away, with affordable options tough to find," and "providers, who have long been in short supply, are stretched thin." The CDC, in August, "published a report which concluded that in late June, 40 percent of adults in the United States had been struggling with mental health or substance abuse issues, and rates of depression and anxiety had risen since 2019."

Ninety-Year-Old Woman Treks Six Miles Through Snow To Get COVID-19 Vaccine.

The New York Times (2/18, Fortin, 20.6M) reports, "To get her coronavirus vaccination last weekend, Frances H. Goldman, 90," brought "out her hiking poles, dusted off her snow boots and started out from her home in the

Seattle neighborhood of View Ridge." At Seattle Children's Hospital, "about three miles and an hour from home, she got the jab. Then she bundled up again and walked back the way she had come." According to the article, "Ms. Goldman, who became eligible for a vaccine last month, had already tried everything she could think of to secure an appointment. She had made repeated phone calls and fruitless visits to the websites of local pharmacies, hospitals and government health departments."

Opinion: Home-Delivery Of COVID-19 Vaccines To Seniors, People With Disabilities In Conflict With California's Goal Of Rapidly Increasing Inoculations.

Columnist George Skelton writes in the Los Angeles Times (2/18, 3.37M) that the Newsom Administration says it is going to home-deliver doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to people with disabilities and shut-in seniors, but its "follow-through on its ideas...hasn't always been that great." Skelton explains, "Home delivery of COVID-19 shots is a goal tucked into a contract awarded by the Newsom administration to Blue Shield of California for expanding and coordinating vaccinations throughout the state," and "Kaiser Permanente is expected to sign a separate contract with the state to operate a vaccination program for its 9 million California healthcare members while helping to inoculate 'hard-to-reach and disproportionately impacted populations,' according to an earlier letter of intent." He adds that the state's ambitious goal "of rapidly increasing inoculations seems in potential conflict with the concept of relatively slow home delivery."

Analysis Highlights Takeaways From COVID-19 Vaccine "Policy Hackathon."

In an analysis, Politico (2/18, Owermohle, 6.73M) says the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in the US has "already run into problems: States got off to a sluggish start in December amid fewer-than-expected doses and confusion over their allotments; the federal plan to prioritize health care workers and elderly populations broke down in practice; and news reports suggesting states were hoarding doses generated bad press." According to the piece, "POLITICO decided to convene a 'policy hackathon' – Zoom sessions in which we asked some of the sharpest public health experts from around the country to compare notes, identify emerging challenges and share the best ideas for making this complex vaccination effort work." Politico provides a summary of "their takeaways," and adds that "White House Covid-19 adviser Andy Slavitt recently urged states not to stockpile supply for second doses."

Don't 'Hector' Workers Over Vaccine, Warns Top US Business Group (CDC Mentioned).

The Financial Times (2/18, Kuchler, Subscription Publication, 1.48M) reports, "The head of one of America's largest business groups has warned US employers against 'hectoring' their workers into taking a Covid-19..."

Editorial: US COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Is More Effective Than It Might Seem.

The Los Angeles Times (2/18, 3.37M) says in an editorial that "it may seem at times that the high hopes for the COVID-19 vaccination rollout have fizzled since December." However, the editorial says, "step back for a moment and chew on this little factoid: In just two months, the U.S. has managed to administer 55 million shots – more than any other country – even during a chaotic time of plague and contentious presidential transition. ... The Biden administration promised it would work with vaccine makers to increase production of doses, and it has delivered."

Arizona Senate Panel Approves Measure To Legalize Test Strips To Detect Fentanyl.

The AP (2/17) reports that an Arizona Senate committee "has unanimously approved a measure that would legalize the use of test strips that can detect the presence of the potent opiate fentanyl." The measure "by Democratic Sen. Christine Marsh was prompted by the death of her 25-year-old son, Landon Marsh, last year." The Senate Health and Human Services committee "approved SB1486on Wednesday, and it now goes to the full Senate for consideration."

Inspector General Report Says HUD Has Neglected To Enforce Environmental Regulations, Potentially Jeopardizing Health Of Thousands.

The Washington Post (2/17, Jan, 10.52M) reports, "The Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD] has for years neglected to enforce its own environmental regulations, resulting in lead poisoning of children in at least one public housing development and potentially jeopardizing residents' health in thousands of other federally subsidized apartments near contaminated sites, according to an inspector general report obtained by The Washington Post." According to the Post, "the West Calumet Housing Complex was declared a Superfund site in 2009 and demolished in 2019, its 1,100 mostly Black and Hispanic residents relocated." A 1998 investigation by HHS "revealed that 30 percent of children under 6 years old in the West Calumet community exhibited elevated blood lead levels. Lead can damage the developing brain."

Flu Season Has Been Virtually Nonexistent.

The New York Post (2/17, Eustachewich, 7.45M) reports, "The flu season has been virtually nonexistent this season – the lowest rate of hospitalization ever since that data has been tallied." Only "165 flu-related hospitalizations were recorded between Oct. 1 and Feb. 6, according to recent information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention," which is "compared to roughly 400,000 people who were hospitalized during the 2019-2020 flu season."

Former Theranos Official To Testify That Company's Leaders Rejected Idea That Blood-Testing Technology Was Not Accurate Enough.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Randazzo, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports Kingshuk Das, who was the laboratory director for Theranos in the blood-testing startup's final years, will testify during the founder's criminal trial that the company's leaders rejected Das' belief that the startup's technology was not accurate enough for use.

Airlines Ban Emotional-Support Animals, But Trained Service Dogs Can Fly For Free.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, McCartney, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that although airlines have banned emotional-support animals from flying in their cabins, trained service dogs may fly for free, without cages.

STAT Profiles Truveta Which Aims To Sell De-Identified Medical Data To Answer Questions.

STAT (2/17, Ross, 262K) reports on "Truveta, a company formed by 14 U.S. health systems to aggregate and sell de-identified data on millions of American patients to help answer some of medicine's most pressing

questions." The company is led by former Microsoft software engineer Terry Myerson who "led the development of products such as Xbox and Surface."

Bluebird Bio Suspends Operations Of Gene Therapy For Sickle Cell Disease After Two More Cancer Diagnoses.

STAT (2/17, Feuerstein, 262K) reports Bluebird Bio announced that two more people "being treated with its gene therapy for sickle cell disease had been diagnosed with cancer," which "has forced the company to suspend operations and raised fears of a broader impact across the gene therapy field." STAT adds, "The cases follow an earlier cancer diagnosis in December 2018, and are refocusing attention on whether there is a causal link with the therapy."

Study Adds To Mounting Evidence That Synonymous Variants Can Have Consequences.

The Scientist (2/17, Zimmer, 157K) reports, "For decades, researchers have viewed synonymous mutations as inconsequential quirks of the genome." However, "like other historically underappreciated aspects of the genome, scientists are realizing that many 'silent' mutations might not be so silent after all." A study published "in iScience adds to the mounting evidence that synonymous variants can have consequences," as "the authors describe a synonymous mutation in the gene BAP1 that was associated with a worse-than-expected prognosis in a kidney cancer patient."

If Woman Has Heart Health Factors While Pregnant, Her Child May Have Poor Heart Health Years Later, Study Suggests.

The Chicago Tribune (2/17, Bowen, 2.03M) reports, "If a woman has heart health factors, such as obesity and smoking while pregnant, her child might end up a decade later with poor heart health, according to a new study from Northwestern Medicine and the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago." The study "researchers found that among moms who had more than two heart health factors – like obesity, smoking, high blood pressure or cholesterol – their children were nearly eight times more likely to have poor heart health, monitoring factors in the kids like blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose." The findings were published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. According to the Tribune, "The Surgeon General's plan to improve maternal health noted that heart disease is a leading cause of death during pregnancy. "

Utah Bill Attempts To Undo Some Vaping Restrictions.

KTVX-TV Salt Lake City (2/17, Martin) reports, "The debate over vaping is ramping up this legislative session with a bill trying to undo some vaping restrictions in Utah." Over the past "few years, the state legislature has given the Utah Department of Health the power to limit nicotine sales and quantities in Utah; now a lawmaker wants to take that power back with S.B. 134."

Indian River County May Raise Legal Age To Buy Tobacco To 21.

TCPalm (FL) (2/17, Wixon, 273K) reports Indian River County may soon "raise the legal age to buy tobacco, including electronic cigarettes and vaping products, to 21." On Tuesday, county commissioners "said they want to consider changing the age from 18 to 21," although "chairman Peter O'Bryan requested an exemption for 18- to 20-year old members of the military."

Vermont Lawmakers Considering Ban On Sales Of Flavored Cigarettes, E-Cigarettes.

WVNY-TV Burlington, VT (2/17, Bates) reports the Vermont Legislature is considering "a bill to ban the sale of flavored cigarettes, e-cigs, and e-liquids."

WPTZ-TV Burlington, VT (2/17, Leighton, 63K) reports "a hearing on the bill was held on Wednesday in the Senate Health and Welfare Committee."

Arizona Lawmakers Considering Bill Allowing Women To Skip Trip To Physician's Office To Obtain Birth Control.

The Arizona Republic (2/17, Polletta, 1.05M) reports "the Arizona Legislature this year could make it easier for women to get birth control pills, patches and rings by letting them skip a trip to the doctor's office before heading to the pharmacy." A bill in the Senate "would allow a state Health Services Department physician to issue a standing prescription for certain hormonal contraceptives, meaning women 18 and older would not need to secure individual prescriptions on their own." Under the bill, "the system would work more like the standing order that lets Arizona pharmacists dispense emergency drugs for opioid overdoses."

GSK, Vir Biotechnology To Expand Partnership To Develop Therapies For Diseases Beyond COVID-19.

Reuters (2/17, Spalding) reports GlaxoSmithKline and Vir Biotechnology "will expand an existing partnership developing antibody therapies for COVID-19 to other diseases, the companies said on Wednesday." As "a part of the deal to research and develop monoclonal antibody treatments for influenza and other respiratory illnesses, GSK will make a further $120 million equity investment in Vir and an additional upfront payment of $225 million." The companies "announced a partnership last year to research COVID-19 treatments. Unlike vaccines, antibody treatments are designed to be given to patients who have been diagnosed with the illness, with the aim of decreasing the severity of the disease."

FierceBiotech (2/17, Adams, 4K) reports the companies' 2020 deal aimed "to develop an antibody against SARS-CoV-02, though the companies are behind in development terms compared to the likes of Eli Lilly and Regeneron, both of which have treatments that were given emergency clearance from the FDA in recent months."

Also reporting are Endpoints News (2/17, Mast), BioPharma Dive (2/17, Jensen), and MedCity News (2/17, Vinluan).

Opinion Offers Advice On Shifting The Drug Development Paradigm For Rare Diseases.

In an opinion piece for STAT (2/17, 262K), Sanath Kumar Ramesh, founder and CEO of the OpenTreatments Foundation; Max G. Bronstein, founder of the Journal of Science Policy & Governance and principal at MGB Consulting; and R. Jude Samulski, Chief Scientific Officer of the Columbus Children's Foundation, write, "In addition to the most visible effects of Covid-19 – tragic deaths, lingering illness, economic turmoil, and more – the pandemic is affecting much that is out of the spotlight. One is research on the so-called rare and ultra-rare diseases that affect an estimated 300 million people around the world." While treatments, including gene therapy and gene editing with CRISPR technology, are available, "more than 95% of rare diseases do not have a single

FDA-approved treatment." The authors argue, "The world needs a drug development paradigm that serves all patients regardless of rarity."

FDA Recalls Lots Of Capsules Containing Undeclared Sildenafil, Tadalafil.

The Miami Herald (2/17, Neal, 647K) reports the US FDA has recalled "all lots of Adam's Secret Extra Strength 1500 and Adam's Secret Extra Strength 3000 capsules, sold at Adamssecret.co in 10-capsule boxes and blister foil sheets...as unapproved drugs." The recall notice said "an FDA laboratory analysis found the product to contain undeclared sildenafil and/or tadalafil," making the capsules "unapproved new drugs for which the safety and efficacy have not been established and therefore subject to recall."

North Carolina Man Pleads Guilty To Distributing Unapproved Drugs After Selling Fake Diet Pills.

The Raleigh (NC) News & Observer (2/17, Shaffer, 396K) reports former MedFixRX owner Brian Parks, 47, of North Carolina "will spend a year and a day in federal prison after his Cary-based company imported and sold drugs disguised as dietary supplements for building muscle mass." Parks "pleaded guilty in November to one count of distributing unapproved new drugs with the intent to mislead and defraud consumers and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration."

San Francisco Biotechnology Firm Lands Two Big Deals For Cancer-Fighting Drug.

The San Francisco Business Times (2/17, Leuty, Subscription Publication, 895K) reports, "A cancer-fighting drug already at the center of multiple late-stage clinical trials with a Big Pharma company is headlining two more deals involving San Francisco-based Nektar Therapeutics Inc." Both deals "center on a trial of bempegaldesleukin – also known simply as 'bempeg' or NKTR-214 – in combination with Merck & Co.'s Keytruda against types of head and neck cancer." The deal "with Merck itself is a more traditional agreement where Nektar sponsors the study and Merck supplies Keytruda and other help; the other, with Pleasanton's SFJ Pharmaceuticals, gives Nektar up to $150 million to complete a study but with Nektar making annual milestone payments back to SFJ over seven to eight years."

SpyBiotech Raises $32.5M For Its Vaccine Technology.

Endpoints News (2/17, Gelman) reports, "Roughly five months after partnering with the Serum Institute of India to develop Covid-19 vaccines, SpyBiotech is ready for its next big thing." The British biotech "pulled in a $32.5 million Series A round last week, funneling the success of its collaboration into a venture-capital raise." SpyBiotech "is planning to develop its VLP vaccine platform with the cash, but CEO Sumi Biswas told Endpoints News that could go in any number of directions."

Global Health News

Taiwan To Receive COVID-19 Vaccines From BioNTech, Company Says.

Reuters (2/17) reports, "Germany's BioNTech SE plans to provide COVID-19 vaccine to Taiwan, the company said." Taiwan previously "complained the firm in December pulled out of a deal to buy 5 million doses at the last

minute, possibly due to Chinese pressure." According to the article, "In an emailed statement late Wednesday, the company said it was planning on providing vaccine to Taiwan."

State Department Says US Will Pay Over $200M In Current Dues To WHO.

Roll Call (2/17, Oswald, 130K) reports that by the end of February, the US "will pay off the arrears it owes to the World Health Organization as well as its current year obligations, the State Department announced Wednesday." Speaking to "the U.N. Security Council, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States would provide more than $200 million 'in assessed and current obligations to the WHO' as a 'key step' toward complying with U.S. financial obligations as a member country." Blinken said the move "reflects our renewed commitment to ensuring the WHO has the support it needs to lead the global response to the pandemic, even as we work to reform it for the future."

India To Make COVID-19 Molecular Tests Mandatory For People Arriving From UK, South Africa, Brazil.

Reuters (2/18, Das) reports, "India will make COVID-19 molecular tests mandatory for people arriving directly or indirectly from the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil in a bid to contain the spread of more infectious virus variants found in those countries." India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare stated, "All the travellers arriving transitioning through flights originating in [the] United Kingdom, Europe or the Middle East shall be mandatorily subjected to self-paid confirmatory molecular tests on arrival."

Nepal Authorizes COVID-19 Vaccine Developed By Sinopharm Affiliate.

Reuters (2/18, Sharma) reports, "Nepal approved on Thursday the emergency use of a COVID-19 vaccine developed by an affiliate of China's Sinopharm, a government official said, the second vaccine cleared after AstraZeneca's product." The approval will enable "China to donate 500,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine to the Himalayan nation, which last month received one million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine free of charge from" India.

UN Chief Calls For Global Vaccination Plan To Ensure Equitable COVID-19 Shot Distribution.

The AP (2/17, Lederer) reports, "U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres sharply criticized the 'wildly uneven and unfair' distribution of COVID-19 vaccines on Wednesday, saying 10 countries have administered 75 percent of all vaccinations and demanding a global effort to get all people in every nation vaccinated as soon as possible." Guterres "told a high-level meeting of the U.N. Security Council that 130 countries have not received a single dose of vaccine and declared that 'at this critical moment, vaccine equity is the biggest moral test before the global community.'" In light of this, "Guterres called for an urgent Global Vaccination Plan to bring together those with the power to ensure equitable vaccine distribution – scientists, vaccine producers and those who can fund the effort."

EU Says It Is On Track To Have Up To 2.6 Billion COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.

The AP (2/17, Jordans, Petrequin) reports that "amid signs that more infectious coronavirus variants are spreading unchecked across Europe, governments and EU leaders scrambled Wednesday to speed up vaccine

efforts that have been hampered by limited supplies and to fund ways to hunt down variants and counter them." The European Union "announced Wednesday that it has agreed to buy a further 300 million doses of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine and was injecting almost a quarter of a billion euros (almost $300 million) into efforts to combat virus variants." The AP adds that "the news came only hours after Pfizer and BioNTech said they had signed a deal to deliver an additional 200 million vaccine doses to the bloc. ... 'With a portfolio of up to 2.6 billion doses, we will be able to provide vaccines not just to our citizens, but to our neighbors and partners as well,' EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said."

South Africa Begins Administering J&J's COVID-19 Vaccine.

The AP (2/17, Imray, Magome) reports, "South Africa has put its faith in the J&J vaccine after a large international clinical trial showed it to be effective in offering protection from the variant first identified in the country in December. Early results from that trial showed it had 57% efficacy against moderate to severe cases of COVID-19 caused by the variant, and a higher efficacy against severe illness and hospitalization." If the vaccination effort is successful in South Africa it "could also embolden the rest of the continent, where fears that poor countries are being left behind in the vaccine race are keenly felt."

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Steinhauser, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) also reports.

Some European Healthcare Workers Pushing For COVID-19 Vaccines From Moderna, Pfizer Over AstraZeneca.

Bloomberg (2/17, Kresge, Loh, Rogers, 3.57M) reports that while just "weeks ago, the European Union was clamoring for AstraZeneca Plc's Covid-19 vaccine," at this current time, "fewer than one-tenth of the doses delivered to Germany have been administered in the initial days of the roll-out, and some health-care workers say they're concerned about side effects." Similarly, "some French health workers are also pushing to get shots from Moderna Inc., Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE instead."

Pfizer Has Yet To Deliver Roughly 10 Million COVID-19 Vaccine Doses To EU Due In December.

Reuters (2/17, Guarascio) reports, "Pfizer has not yet delivered to the European Union about 10 million COVID-19 vaccine doses that were due in December, EU officials said, leaving it about one-third short of the supplies it had expected by now from the U.S. company." This most recent delay "raises questions about the rationale of an EU vaccine export control scheme which was set up in late January to ensure timely deliveries but has not yet been activated, despite the supply shortfalls."

Central European Leaders Push For Faster COVID-19 Vaccine Deliveries.

The AP (2/17, Scislowska) reports, "Central European leaders on Wednesday pushed for speedier deliveries of COVID-19 vaccines from every reliable manufacturer to speed up inoculations which they said is the way to conquer the pandemic and jump-start Europe's economic recovery." Notably, "leaders of Hungary, Slovakia and Poland said they support purchasing vaccines from manufacturers regardless of 'geopolitics' provided they are safe and effective."

Japan Launches COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign.

The AP (2/17, Yamaguchi) reports, "Japan launched its coronavirus vaccination campaign Wednesday, months after other major economies started giving shots and amid questions about whether the drive would...reach enough people quickly enough to save a Summer Olympics already delayed by the pandemic."

Senegal To Receive 200,000 Doses Of Sinopharm's COVID-19 Vaccine.

The AP (2/17, Dione) reports, "Senegal is to receive 200,000 doses of the Chinese COVID-19 vaccine Sinopharm Wednesday."

Reuters (2/17, Bell, Felix) also reports.

Britain Becomes First Country To Approve Human Challenge Trials For COVID-19.

Reuters (2/17, Sandle, Kelland) reports, "Britain became the first country in the world on Wednesday to give the go-ahead for human challenge trials in which volunteers will deliberately be exposed to COVID-19 to advance research into the disease caused by the novel coronavirus." The new "trial, due to start within a month, will see up to 90 healthy volunteers aged between 18 and 30 exposed to the smallest amount of the virus needed to cause infection, scientists behind the plans told reporters at a news briefing."

Also reporting are the Washington Post (2/17, Adam, 10.52M), the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Strasburg, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), CNN (2/17, Braithwaite, 89.21M), Politico Europe (2/17, Furlong, 15K), The Hill (2/17, Axelrod, 5.69M), and the New York Times (2/17, Mueller, 20.6M).

Britain Proposes UN Draft Resolution Calling For COVID-19 Vaccination Ceasefires.

Reuters (2/17, Nichols) reports, "Britain on Wednesday proposed that the U.N. Security Council call for ceasefires to allow for COVID-19 vaccinations, a move that will be a key test of cooperation at the United Nations between China and new U.S. President Joe Biden's administration." UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab is calling for the Security Council to swiftly adopt "a draft resolution calling for vaccination ceasefires, warning that 160 million people are at risk of missing out due to instability and conflict."

'Horrifying' Death Toll Prompts Calls To Prioritize Jabs For Disabled.

The Financial Times (2/17, Neville, Cocco, Subscription Publication, 1.48M) reports, "People with disabilities in England should be given priority for vaccination against Covid-19, according to leading charities, after..."

Turkey To Slowly Return To Normal Life On Regional Basis Starting Next Month, Erdogan Says.

Reuters (2/17) reports, "Turkey will begin a gradual return to normal life on a province-by-province basis from March, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday, adding that nationwide weekend COVID-19 lockdowns would be lifted in some provinces based on infection rates."

Venezuela To Start Vaccinating Medical Personnel Against COVID-19 This Week, Maduro Says.

Reuters (2/17) reports, "Venezuela will begin vaccinating medical personnel against the novel coronavirus on Thursday, President Nicolas Maduro said in a press conference on Wednesday." His "announcement comes

after the first 100,000 doses of Russia's Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine arrived in the South American country on Saturday."

India Offers To Vaccinate All UN Peacekeepers Globally Against COVID-19.

Reuters (2/17, Nichols) reports, "India on Wednesday offered a COVID-19 vaccine to all United Nations peacekeepers – nearly 95,000 troops in 12 missions around the world."

China Blocking Taiwan's Attempt To Purchase Five Million COVID-19 Doses From BioNTech, Health Minister Says.

Bloomberg (2/17, Horton, 3.57M) reports, "Taiwan's attempts to purchase 5 million doses of BioNTech SE's Covid-19 vaccine fell apart at the last minute, Taiwan's health minister said Wednesday, voicing concern that political pressure from Beijing may have scuppered the deal." Although "Taiwan's government was making final preparations to sign a deal with Germany-based BioNTech in January," things suddenly changed, according to minister Chen Shih-chung during "an interview on radio station Hit FM Wednesday." He said that potential arrangements were disrupted by "external forces," adding, "There are some people that don't want Taiwan to be too happy."

Israel Allows Palestinian Authority To Deliver First COVID-19 Vaccines To Gaza Strip.

The AP (2/17, Akram, Krauss) reports that on Wednesday, Israel "allowed the Palestinian Authority to deliver the first coronavirus vaccines to the Gaza Strip...despite objections from Israeli lawmakers who suggested they be used as a bargaining chip for the release of captives held by the territory's militant Hamas rulers."

The Washington Post (2/17, Hendrix, Rubin, 10.52M) reports that "some right-wing Israeli politicians and activists want to condition the delivery of vaccines on the release of hostages and human remains held by Hamas."

The Hill (2/17, 5.69M) also reports.

Tanzania's President Falsely Claims His Country Is "COVID-Free."

The Washington Post (2/17, Ombuor, Bearak, 10.52M) reports, "Tanzania's president [John Magufuli] recently rejected any need for coronavirus vaccines, instead promoting herbal cures." The leader "claims the nation of 60 million has been "COVID-free" since he presided over three days of national prayer in June." Despite his claim, "the U.S. Embassy in Tanzania says the country has seen a significant increase in cases over the past month."

Belgian Teachers Threaten To Strike Unless They Get Access To COVID-19 Vaccines.

The Washington Post (2/17, Birnbaum, Ariès, 10.52M) reports that in Belgium, despite schools already being reopened, "teachers who found themselves left off a priority list for [COVID-19] vaccinations are threatening to strike unless they receive doses." This "dispute may foreshadow more disruptions to fragile pandemic-era arrangements, as some groups decide they are less willing to take risks now that society could choose to inoculate them – but won't until vaccines are in greater supply."

Russia, China Using COVID-19 Vaccine Supply To Boost Geopolitical Influence.

CNBC (2/17, Meredith, 7.34M) reports, "International diplomacy is likely to determine who gets access to coronavirus vaccines over the coming months, analysts have told CNBC, with countries such as Russia and China seen using one of the world's most in-demand commodities to advance their own interests abroad." Last year, "Russia and China had made distributing face masks and protective equipment to hard-hit countries a central tenet of diplomatic relations," and "now, both countries are seen adopting a transactional approach to the delivery of vaccines."

Iran Says Its COVIran Barakat Vaccine Is "100% Effective" Against UK Coronavirus Variant.

Bloomberg (2/17, Haghdoost, 3.57M) reports, "Iran says one of its Covid-19 vaccines," the COVIran Barakat vaccine, "has been found to give complete protection against the British variant of the virus in human trials." The shot, "which has completed the first phase of clinical trials, is '100% effective' against the highly contagious strain, the Tasnim news agency reported, citing Mohammad Mokhber, head of the state-run foundation overseeing production of domestic shots." Iranian "officials have said the vaccine should be approved for public use by the summer." A facility "with the capacity to produce up to 3 million COVIran vaccines per month will be opened in two weeks, with a planned expansion allowing for up to 15 million doses by June, Mokhber said."

India's Largest Healthcare Chain Expects Private COVID-19 Vaccine Market To Open Up Within Weeks.

Bloomberg (2/17, Kay, 3.57M) reports, "India's largest healthcare chain [Apollo Hospitals Enterprises] expects a private market for Covid-19 vaccines to open up across the country within weeks, a move that may boost current government efforts to inoculate 300 million people by August." The healthcare chain "is working with India's government to provide vaccines for front line workers at 27 centers as part of the nationwide vaccination drive." So far, "the operator has trained 6,000 people and designated 3,500 sites for an expansion of the inoculation campaign, according to Managing Director Suneeta Reddy."

South Africa Coronavirus Variant Associated With 16-Fold Increase In COVID-19 Cases In Zambia.

Bloomberg (2/17, 3.57M) reports, "A coronavirus variant first detected in South Africa was linked to a 16-fold increase in cases in neighboring Zambia within a month, showing it has the ability to spread more swiftly and efficiently than the original strain."

Namibia Will Roll Out AstraZeneca's COVID-19 Vaccine Despite South Africa Halting Distribution Amid New Coronavirus Variant.

Reuters (2/17, Nyaungwa) reports, "Namibia will push ahead with the roll-out of the AstraZeneca vaccine despite neighbouring South Africa halting distribution after concerns over its effectiveness against a new variant, the government said on Wednesday."

COVAX-Participating Countries Will Soon Receive Information On First COVID-19 Vaccine Shipments, PAHO Says.

Reuters (2/17, Garrison) reports, "Countries participating in the COVAX coronavirus vaccine distribution mechanism will soon receive confirmation of their first shipments but should expect them to be small due to

limited global supplies, the director of the Pan American Health Organization said on Wednesday." Roughly "160 million doses would be distributed in the region in the first six months with doses ramping up monthly, Etienne said, adding that a global squeeze on supplies meant initial shipments would be limited."

Sao Paulo's Serrana Selected For Population-Wide COVID-19 Vaccination Study.

The AP (2/17, Jeantet, Pollastri) reports that Sao Paulo's state government has selected Serrana to test city-wide vaccination against COVID-19, with plans to administer "shots over eight weeks to the entire population aged 18 and up – 30,000 people." The vaccination "study, known as Project S, entails follow-ups with each participant to shed light on the extent to which vaccination with the CoronaVac shot reduces spread of the virus."

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Pearson, Magalhaes, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) also reports.

Toronto Health Officials Want Ontario Government To Extend Lockdown.

The AP (2/17, Gillies) reports that Toronto "asked the Ontario provincial government on Wednesday to extend a lockdown order to at least March 9." Although "restrictions placed on Toronto by Ontario's government are currently scheduled to be removed on Feb 22...Dr. Eileen de Villa, Toronto's medical officer of health, said she has never been more worried about the future because of new coronavirus variants." As such, "she has written the province's top health official to request the lockdown last at least two weeks longer."

Mexico Pleads For Countries To Stop Hoarding COVID-19 Vaccines.

Reuters (2/17, Angulo) reports, "Mexico on Wednesday made a plea at the U.N. Security Council for countries to stop hoarding vaccines against COVID-19 as poorer ones fall behind in the race to vaccinate their citizens."

Public Outcry Continues In Peru Over Secret COVID-19 Vaccinations Among Wealthy.

The AP (2/17, Briceño) reports, "Public indignation over secret coronavirus vaccinations for the wealthy and well-connected in Peru grew Wednesday, a day after the Vatican's ambassador to the South American nation admitted he was inoculated ahead of health care workers and the poor." The secretive "vaccination of nearly 500 people, including a then-president, his wife and brother, has roused anger over inequality in a country that has been badly battered by the pandemic, which has taken the lives of at least 310 doctors." Underscoring the anger, "doctors and nurses in an impoverished neighborhood in the capital of Lima on Wednesday protested the secret vaccination effort and hung signs from the windows of a hospital's intensive care unit that read, 'Getting a vaccine is our right.'"

The Washington Post (2/17, Tegel, 10.52M) also reports.

Most Countries In Europe Ignoring Mentally Ill In COVID-19 Vaccine Plans, Groups Say.

Reuters (2/17) reports, "Most European countries are ignoring mentally ill patients in their COVID-19 vaccine strategies despite such patients being highly vulnerable to contracting and dying from the disease, the leading mental health organisations warned on Wednesday." Out of 20 countries in Europe "surveyed for a study, only the Netherlands, Britain, Germany and Denmark were found to recognise severe mental illness as a high-risk medical condition and to have made specific provisions for vaccinating patients."

New COVID-19 Infections In England Fall Significantly In Recent Weeks.

Bloomberg (2/18, Mayes, 3.57M) reports that new COVID-19 "infections in England have fallen "significantly" in recent weeks, a boost to U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson as he weighs how quickly to re-open Britain's economy." Specifically, "national prevalence of the virus was down by two-thirds in the first half of February compared to January, according to a survey by Imperial College London and Ipsos Mori, one of the country's largest coronavirus studies." Overall, "the number of infected people fell to 51 per 10,000 at the time of the latest survey in February, down from 157 per 10,000 in January."

People In Brazil Getting COVID-19 Vaccines Illicitly, Then Bragging About It On Social Media.

The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Pearson, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that politicians, influential business owners and lawyers, along with other professionals in Brazil are illicitly getting COVID-19 vaccinations and then boasting about it on social media, prompting law enforcement to open investigations.

Coronavirus Infections, Deaths Falling Worldwide.

Bloomberg (2/18, Sutherland, 3.57M) reports that "there are some encouraging signs as new global" coronavirus "infections fall sharply." New COVID-19 "cases for the week ended Feb. 14 were the lowest since October, at 2.7 million, according to data from Johns Hopkins University." That signifies "a 2.5% increase in total infections from the previous week, the weakest gain since the start of the pandemic and less than half the rate seen a month earlier." Furthermore, "daily fatalities have averaged less than 10,000 over the past five days, down from a peak of more than 18,000 in mid-January."

Africa Nears 100K COVID-19 Deaths.

Reuters (2/18, Winning, Cocks, Roelf) reports "Africa's total reported death toll from COVID-19 was approaching 100,000 on Thursday, a fraction of those reported on other continents but rising fast as a second wave of infections overwhelms hospitals." Africa's "reported deaths, at 99,800, compare favourably with North America, which has registered more than half a million, and Europe, which is approaching 900,000, a Reuters tally shows." However, fatalities "are rising sharply across Africa, driven by its southern region, especially economic powerhouse South Africa, which accounts for nearly half."

Canadian Researchers Urge Delay In Administering Second Dose Of Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine.

Reuters (2/18, Kalia, Shibu) reports, "Two Canada-based researchers on Wednesday urged governments to delay administering the second dose of Pfizer Inc's COVID-19 vaccine, which they said had an efficacy of 92.6% after the first dose, as it was not significantly beneficial in the short term." The researchers "said their findings were derived from Pfizer's documents submitted to the" US FDA. The researchers "cautioned that there may be uncertainty about the duration of protection with a single dose, but said that the administration of the second dose a month after the first provided 'little added benefit in the short term.'"

UK Planning First Human Challenge Study For COVID-19.

Bloomberg (2/18, Gale, 3.57M) reports, "The U.K. plans to deliberately infect dozens of healthy young adult volunteers in the coming weeks with SARS-CoV-2 to learn more about how the virus affects people and the

effectiveness of experimental vaccines." This first human challenge study for COVID-19 "has been approved by the country's clinical trials ethics body and aims to start by mid-March." However, the article says "it throws up a number of questions, including the availability of reliable 'rescue treatments' in the event that participants develop a serious illness."

Air Pollution Led To Tens Of Thousands Of Fatalities In World's Five Most Populous Cities In 2020, Researchers Say.

Reuters (2/17, Taylor) reports "air pollution caused tens of thousands of deaths in the world's five most populous cities last year despite coronavirus lockdowns, researchers said on Thursday, urging governments to ditch fossil fuels and invest in a green recovery." In the world's "five most-populated cities – Delhi, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Shanghai and Tokyo – air pollution caused about 160,000 deaths and economic losses [totaling] about $85 billion." Delhi had the largest "death toll among the five biggest cities, with some 54,000 deaths – or one per 500 people – due to high levels of tiny pollution particles, known as PM2.5, which can cause lung and heart diseases, the study said."

HHS in the News

US Life Expectancy Dropped By One Year In First Half Of 2020.

The New York Times (2/18, Tavernise, Goodnough, 20.6M) reports "life expectancy in the United States fell by a full year in the first six months of 2020, the federal government reported on Thursday, the largest drop since World War II and a grim measure of the deadly consequences of the coronavirus pandemic." The new data give "the first full picture of the pandemic's effect on American life spans, which dropped to 77.8 years from 78.8 years in 2019." The data "also showed a deepening of racial and ethnic disparities: Life expectancy of the Black population declined by 2.7 years in the first half of 2020, slicing away 20 years of gains."

The Washington Post (2/17, A1, Bernstein, 10.52M) reports "Americans can now expect to live as long as they did in 2006, according to the provisional data released by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), a part of the" CDC. Latinos lost 1.9 years of life expectancy, and white Americans lost 0.8 years, the data show.

Bloomberg (2/18, Tanzi, 3.57M) says the report showed the gap in life expectancy "between the sexes rose to 5.4 years, the most in more than two decades."

USA Today (2/18, Rodriguez, 12.7M) reports "health experts fear U.S. life expectancy in 2020 as a whole will be worse than the half-year numbers because they do not account for the fall and winter surges that led to record COVID-19 deaths."

The Wall Street Journal (2/18, Adamy, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that in December, CDC National Center for Health Statistics mortality-statistics branch chief Robert Anderson predicted life expectancy may drop two or three years when data on the entire year of 2020 are released.

Senate Finance Panel To Hold Confirmation Hearing For HHS Secretary Nominee On February 24.

Inside Health Policy (2/17, Mills-Gregg, Subscription Publication) reports "the Senate Finance Committee will hold a confirmation hearing for HHS Secretary nominee Xavier Becerra on Feb. 24, the day after the Senate health committee considers his nomination." Senate Finance Chair Ron Wyden (D-OR) said in a statement, "I'm

more confident than ever that [California] Attorney General Becerra is the right person to lead the way in the fight against COVID-19 and continue the essential work of ensuring all Americans can get quality, affordable health care."

Editorial: Becerra Is Troubling Choice For HHS Secretary.

An editorial in the Los Angeles Daily News (2/17, 256K) says, "The nomination of California Attorney General Xavier Becerra to serve as the U.S. Health and Human Services secretary is President Joe Biden's most controversial cabinet choice to date." The editorial adds, "Becerra is a troubling choice, especially given HHS's importance during a pandemic."

"Bristol Variant" Of Coronavirus Identified In US For First Time.

The New York Post (2/17, Jacobs, 7.45M) reports "a new mutation of the highly contagious UK coronavirus variant has been found in the US, the feds revealed Wednesday." CDC Director "Rochelle Walensky said at a White House briefing that the first case of the B117 variant with the E484K mutation – known as the 'Bristol variant' – has been identified." She "declined to specify where the US case had been detected, or the status of the patient."

Kessler Discusses Drop In COVID-19 Cases In US During Interview.

In an interview on MSNBC's Rachel Maddow Show (2/17, 769K), former FDA Commissioner David Kessler, who is now the chief science officer for the COVID-19 response in the Biden Administration, discussed the recent decrease in COVID-19 cases in the US. Kessler said, "I think it is too early to say that this decrease is due to a vaccine effect. We are seeing a decrease in the number of cases in long-term care facilities, and some of my colleagues are suggesting...that may be a vaccine effect, and that may be good news, but it's still too early."

Biden Administration Rejects Calls To Update Guidelines That Discourage Americans From Using N95 Respirators.

CBS News (2/17, Tin, 5.39M) reports "the Biden administration is rejecting calls to change current guidelines that discourage the public from wearing N95 respirators, the high-filtration masks currently reserved for health care workers, although some manufacturers say a growing domestic surplus has gone unused." CDC Director Rochelle Walensky "told reporters Wednesday that the agency still believed standard, well-fitting cloth masks were sufficient to curb the spread of COVID-19." Walensky said, "For reasons supported by science, comfort, costs, and practicality, the CDC does not recommend routine use of N95 respirators for protection against COVID-19 by the general public." FDA's Office of Strategic Partnerships and Technology Innovation Director Suzanne Schwartz "said the agency is still receiving reports of 'spot shortages'" of N95 masks.

Opinion: Teachers Unions, "Team Biden" Holding Back Schools From Reopening Full-Time.

In an opinion piece for the New York Post (2/17, 7.45M), contributor John Podhoretz says, "Remember the good old days, when the issue of reopening schools to full-time, in-class instruction was about COVID? It's not about helping people avoid contracting the novel coronavirus any longer." Podhoretz writes, "Now it's about saving them from...mold. And asthma. And other conditions that have nothing whatever to do with COVID and everything to do with coming up with reasons why schools should remain closed until teachers unions decide it's

all right for their members to go back to doing what teachers have done since the days of ancient Athens – instruct their charges in person. Face to face." Podhoretz asserts that "Team Biden is part of the problem." He quotes CDC Director Rochelle Walensky.

Analysis: Pandemic Provides Opportunity For American Healthcare System To Be Fixed.

In an analysis, Politico (2/18, Kenen, 6.73M) says "the work needed to contain and recover from the coronavirus might – just might – create momentum to fix things before the next catastrophe, which will inevitably come in one form or another, perhaps before we've healed from this one." Fixing the country's health system "is hard – and highly politicized. Some changes can be swift; others will take money and time. But there may not be a better moment to get started." Politico adds that CDC Director "Rochelle Walensky has vowed to rebuild public confidence, after some agency policies were undermined or politicized by the Trump White House." Covered California Executive Director Peter Lee, former Surgeon General Jerome Adams, former CMS official Cara James, and Elinore McCance-Katz, who ran the Department of Health and Human Services' mental health agency in the Trump Administration, are mentioned.

Biden Has Reportedly Selected Former Obama Official To Lead CMS.

The Washington Post (2/17, Diamond, Goldstein, 10.52M) reports that President Biden has "selected Chiquita Brooks-LaSure to lead the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, filling a major role in his health-care leadership team." The Post cites "four people who spoke on the condition of anonymity." According to the Post, Brooks-LaSure "served in the Obama administration as a senior CMS official who helped implement the Affordable Care Act's coverage expansion and insurance-market reforms. She also worked on Capitol Hill as a Democratic staff member for the House Ways and Means Committee, building ties with then-Rep. Xavier Becerra, Biden's choice to lead the Health and Human Services department."

The AP (2/17, Alonso-Zaldivar) reports that, if confirmed, "Brooks-LaSure would be the first Black woman to head CMS." According to the AP, "Brooks-LaSure has a long track record in government," most recently leading "the Biden transition's 'landing team' for the Department of Health and Human Services, laying the groundwork for the new administration." As CMS Administrator, "Brooks-LaSure will be expected to grow Obamacare enrollment" and "confront Medicare's long-term financial problems, aggravated by a decline in payroll tax collections because of COVID-related job losses."

STAT (2/17, Florko, Facher, 262K) reports that Brooks-LaSure would "inherit an agency dogged by countless controversies during the Trump administration," including a number of lawsuits, "most notably a Supreme Court case set to be argued in March challenging the agency's new policy of denying health coverage to unemployed Medicaid beneficiaries."

Politico (2/17, Cancryn, Luthi, Roubein, 6.73M) reports similarly that Brooks-LaSure, who "oversaw implementation of Obamacare, if confirmed will play a leading role in crafting Biden's plans to expand on the health care law – and unwind much of the Trump administration's efforts to minimize it."

Also reporting are CNN (2/17, Saenz, Luhby, 89.21M), Fox Business (2/17, Lea, 3.06M), Reuters (2/17) and FierceHealthcare (2/17, King, 150K).

Biden Administration Announces Latest Round Of HHS Appointments.

Healthcare IT News (2/17, Jercich, 2K) reports, "The Biden administration this week announced the latest round of appointments to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services." According to the article, "some vacancies are still drawing attention," including "a permanent administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services." HHS Chief of Staff Sean McCluskie said in a statement, "As our country navigates an unprecedented public health crisis, President Biden is building a strong, experienced, and diverse team at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services." Some "hires listed on the HHS announcement had been previously reported," including "Dr. Rochelle Walensky as Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director." Max Lesko "will be Chief of Staff in the Office of the Surgeon General," and Sonia Chessen "will be the new Chief of Staff at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration."

Supreme Court Review Of Medicaid Work Rules Hinges On Verma Letters.

Bloomberg Law (2/17, Subscription Publication, 4K) reports that the "Trump administration's eleventh-hour attempt to preserve Medicaid work requirements and circumvent President Joe Biden's plan to rescind them hinges on the question of whether the effort amounted to guidance or binding contracts, legal analysts say." At issue "are letters former Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Administrator Seema Verma sent to states in January to keep Medicaid waivers in effect for nine months after any government movement to rescind them." Verma's move "is seen as an attempt to keep the work requirements alive until the Supreme Court can rule on their validity in a case it will hear in March."

Biden Administration Appears To Withdraw Final Rule On Prior Authorization.

FierceHealthcare (2/17, King, 150K) reports that the Biden Administration "appears to have withdrawn a rule finalized last minute by the Trump administration that aims to streamline prior authorization, a major source of provider administrative burden." CMS "released the final rule Jan. 15, touting it as an easy way for patients to get their healthcare data." CMS "did not say why the rule appeared to be withdrawn."

HHS Needs To Overhaul Value-Based Payment Approach, Report Says.

Modern Healthcare (2/17, Brady, Subscription Publication, 215K) reports, "HHS needs to overhaul its approach to value-based payment to ensure widespread practice transformation and rein in Medicare spending, according to a report by the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics at the University of Pennsylvania released Wednesday." Experts have "said the agency needs a new strategy because providers and payers have been too slow to adopt value-based payment, especially arrangements that require providers to take on significant financial risk. In addition, most existing initiatives don't systematically lower healthcare spending or improve quality."

Woodcock Refutes Idea Of Establishing Firewall Between FDA, Drug Companies For Approvals.

Endpoints News (2/17, Gelman) reports that acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock refuted the idea of a firewall between regulators and drugmakers to "prevent lousy drugs from getting the agency's backing." She said, "The firewall you propose would significantly reduce the efficiency of FDA's review process and cause delays in drug development. ... Nor is a firewall necessary to ensure the integrity of FDA's decision-making."

More Than 150 Democratic Congressmen Urge Court To Lift FDA's Restrictions On Prescribing Mifepristone.

Inside Health Policy (2/17, Wang, Subscription Publication) reports 157 "Democratic members of Congress and 23 attorneys general are backing plaintiffs in an appeals case that seeks to prevent FDA from enforcing in-person prescribing restrictions for the abortion medication mifepristone." The lawmakers contend the agency's restrictions go against the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act and exacerbate health disparities.

FDA Leaders Say Agency Made Mistake In Allowing COVID-19 Antibody Tests To Be Sold, Shipped Without Being Reviewed.

Medical Device and Diagnostic Industry (2/17, Ford, 147K) reports FDA Center for Devices and Radiological Health Director Jeffrey Shuren, MD, and FDA Office of In Vitro Diagnostics and Radiological Health Director Timothy Stenzel, MD, PhD, wrote in an editorial in the New England Journal of Medicine that the FDA's decision to allow many COVID-19 antibody tests to be sold and shipped without review was a mistake. Shuren and Stenzel said, "We planned to revisit this policy after authorizing several serology tests. ... In hindsight, however, we realized that the policy outlined in our March 16 guidance was flawed." They added, "Knowing what we know now, we would not have permitted serology tests to be marketed without FDA review and authorization, even within the limits we initially imposed."

National Front Page News

Headlines From Today's Front Pages.

Wall Street Journal:

US Retail Sales Rose Strongly On Stimulus In January
North Korea Turning To Cryptocurrency Schemes In Global Heists, US Says
Insiders At Covid-19 Vaccine Makers Sold Nearly $500 Million Of Stock Last Year
Europe Locked Its Economy In Place. Unlocking It Could Be Ugly.
'I'm Like A SPAC – What the Hell Is That?': Rap Explains Hot Finance Trend
Saudi Arabia Set To Raise Oil Output Amid Recovery In Prices

New York Times:

Desperate For Light And Warmth, Texans See No End For Winter Storm
No, Wind Farms Aren't The Main Cause Of The Texas Blackouts
Biden Signals He's Flexible On Immigration Overhaul
Rush Limbaugh Dies At 70; Turned Talk Radio Into A Right-Wing Attack Machine
Cuomo Faces Revolt As Legislators Move To Strip Him Of Pandemic Powers

Washington Post:

Polarizing Icon Of Conservative Radio
Years Of College Gains For Latinos Endangered

US Life Expectancy Falls By A Year In Pandemic
Democrats Face Divisions On Next Big Spending Bill
Honduran Leader With Lots To Lose Courts Biden
Millions Still In Dark Amid A Winter's Fury

Financial Times:
Facebook Bans Australian News As Impact Of Media Law Is Felt Globally
Mario Draghi Lays Out Ambitious Reforms For Italy
Texans Demand Answers After Dramatic Collapse In Power Supply
EU Announces Fresh Vaccine Deal With Moderna

Story Lineup From Last Night's Network News:
ABC: Texas-Winter Storm; Vaccine Delays; Weather Report; Biden-Agenda; Counterfeit N95 Masks; COVID-Variants; Rush Limbaugh; Flu Season; Prince Philip Hospitalized; Houston-Helping Neighbors.
CBS: Texas-Winter Storm; Weather Report; Vaccine Delays; Biden-Agenda; Biden-Netanyahu; Counterfeit N95 Masks; Rush Limbaugh; Prince Philip Hospitalized; Ashley Judd-Hiking Rescue; Americans Come Together In Pandemic.
NBC: Texas-Winter Storm; Texas-Power Grid; Weather Report; Vaccine Delays; Biden-Agenda; Harris-Schools Reopening; COVID-Students; Biden-Student Loan Debt; Rush Limbaugh; Eagle Scouts.

Network TV At A Glance:
Texas-Winter Storm – 10 minutes, 40 seconds
Biden-Agenda – 5 minutes, 55 seconds
Rush Limbaugh – 5 minutes, 55 seconds
Vaccine Delays – 5 minutes, 25 seconds

Last Laughs

Late Night Political Humor.

Trevor Noah: "After all that talk from Trump, Biden is the one that will have people saying 'Merry Christmas' again. But that's right, Biden is predicting that COVID-19 will be gone from our lives by the end of this year, just in time for COVID-21 to kick into high gear."

Trevor Noah: "And I'm really hopeful that Biden is right, because if things are normal by Christmas, that means Santa can come down the chimney and put my presents under the tree again – unlike last year, when he threw them through my living room window."

Trevor Noah: "Now out of office, Donald Trump is back at the helm of his business empire and trying to figure out how to make money without being able to overcharge the Secret Service. But today, he watched a piece of that empire literally collapse. ... Whoa, hold up. People paid almost 600 bucks to watch that building get

demolished? Did they know Trump wasn't inside? I mean, forget hotels. Trump just needs to build [stuff] with his name on it, and then charge people to watch him blow it up. It will be the most profitable business he's ever had!"

Trevor Noah: "It really says something when even Atlantic City is like, 'Trump is giving a bad name to our town full of pawn shops and strip clubs. It's gotta go. We can't be associated with that name.'"

Trevor Noah: [On former President Trump saying Senate Minority Leader McConnell has "too many chins and not enough brains"] "While Trump's hotel was exploding from within, so is the party that Trump leads. In the wake of the Capitol riots...a split has emerged in the party between Trump loyalists and traditional conservatives like Mitch McConnell, who blamed Trump for the riot and basically called for him to be charged with crimes. Well, now, Trump is striking back. ... Okay, you know what? How dare you, Donald? Mitch McConnell does not have multiple chins, okay? He doesn't have any chins. He has a neck sack that he developed to store air so he can breathe underwater! Learn some biology!"

Trevor Noah: "This is some fancy trash talk. 'Dour, sullen.' I think this proves that social media makes you dumber. I mean, Trump's been off Twitter for a couple weeks, and he's already learning a new SAT word a day. He also called Mitch 'unsmiling,' which is just such classic Trump. No matter who you are, Trump will find a way to sexually harass you. 'Mitch, you're a failure. A disaster for party. And why don't you smile more, baby? Come on, show us a little smile.'"

Jimmy Kimmel: "The White House is said to be in talks with Amazon right now to help distribute the vaccine. The way it will work is, any Prime member who can prove they've watched all six seasons of 'Bosch' will get vaccinated."

Jimmy Kimmel: "Our new President held a CNN town hall with Anderson Cooper last night. He said he's tired of talking about Donald Trump. And referred to Donald Trump as 'the former guy.' Which I love, because he will hate that more than anything."

Jimmy Kimmel: "Joe knows that the way to deflate Trump is to ignore him. But it's hard. He's like a 2-year-old. You worry that if you take your eye off him, he'll flush your keys down the toilet."

Jimmy Kimmel: "One of the former President's most famous failures, the Trump Plaza Casino, was imploded today in Atlantic City. Every chapter of Trump's biography is 11."

Jimmy Kimmel: "Team Trump put out a statement saying that Giuliani is not currently representing Trump in any legal matters. ... And with Trump off his plate now, Rudy has more time for his true passion – walking the streets of Ukraine screaming Hunter Biden's name."

National News

Biden Visiting Swing States To Push COVID Relief Plan.

TIME (2/17, Abramson, Bennett, 18.1M) reports President Biden is leaving Washington "to pitch his $1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package to voters in key swing states." Biden had been scheduled to "spend Thursday in

Kalamazoo, Michigan, touring a Pfizer vaccine production facility and meeting with workers," though the trip was postponed due to inclement weather. By "selecting two of the most critical battleground states, he's using his political capital to tell the voters that helped send him to the White House how he's delivering on his campaign pledges – and why they should stick with Democrats in elections to come. ... But first and foremost, Biden is hoping to cement bipartisan support for his relief bill."

Meanwhile, Bloomberg (2/17, Fabian, 3.57M) reports Vice President Harris will hold a virtual meeting Thursday "with a group of female Democratic lawmakers and advocacy groups...as part of the White House's push to build support" for its relief bill. The meeting, which will include Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Chairwoman Patty Murray, House Appropriations Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro, Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), and Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA), "will focus on the economic struggles women have faced as a result of the pandemic and how President Joe Biden's proposal would address them, according to Harris's office." Bloomberg adds, "The groups participating in the Thursday meeting with Harris are mostly left-leaning. Service Employees International Union President Mary Kay Henry and Tina Tchen, CEO of the anti-sexual harassment group Time's UP, are expected to join, as are nine other leaders of organizations representing Black women, Native Americans, mothers and female business owners."

White House Office of Public Engagement Director Cedric Richmond said on MSNBC (2/17, 1.89M), "We think this plan is going to get passed. A lot of it is going to be because of the hard work that the President and Vice President put in, in articulating the need for this plan to members of Congress, but also because the public is so vocal about the need for it and the fact that we need it right now, we shouldn't wait, we shouldn't delay. And I think that is having a big effect. The public support for it will help us get it through."

E.J. Dionne writes in the Washington Post (2/17, 10.52M) that Biden and Democrats are "no longer scared. They're not defensive, or constantly looking over their shoulders, or making preemptive concessions to Republicans." Dionne adds while Republicans "will probably swing some of their supporters away from Biden's economic plan," Biden and Democrats "are operating with confidence because they have finally embraced what has long been true: Progressive economic policies are broadly popular." Most Americans "turn to the federal government to act boldly in a time of crisis not because they love government in the abstract but because they understand it as the only entity capable of taking on certain large tasks. That's why Biden is confident about the course he's on – and it's why he shouldn't back down."

Local Officials From Both Parties Seek COVID Relief. The AP (2/17, Barrow) reports the coronavirus has impacted city budgets, and mayors and local leaders of both parties have turned to Washington for help. President Biden's relief plan "would send about $350 billion to state, local and tribal governments, with about $140 billion of that set aside for cities and counties," but "Republicans in Washington have stood in the way of sending federal aid to cities, leaving local leaders and public employee unions worried they'll get shortchanged as Congress negotiates the next COVID-19 response package." The AP says the Republican position carries "political risks. In rejecting a bill with help for lower governments, Republican lawmakers may soon find themselves voting against high-profile allies and forcing those constituents to depend on President Joe Biden and his fellow Democrats."

WPost: Lawmakers Should Keep Bill Focused On COVID Relief. The Washington Post (2/17, 10.52M) argues in an editorial that more federal funding is needed "to cope with the ongoing damage done by the covid-19 pandemic, and Congress and President Biden should provide it on the widest bipartisan basis possible – and swiftly. That means setting aside legislative items not directly related to covid, despite lawmakers'

inevitable temptation to take advantage of a crisis to advance other priorities." The Post says the current House bill "shows signs of losing focus in just that way" as the House Ways and Means Committee "has attached a plan to rescue financially troubled retirement systems known as multiemployer pensions." The Post argues that "this particular bit of sausage-making illustrates the complications that develop when lawmakers start to stray from straightforward attention to the most urgent covid-related needs."

WSJournal Says Relief Bill Includes $22B Tax On Multinational Companies. A Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) editorial says the COVID relief measure includes "a $22 billion tax increase on multinational companies." The Journal says it is "a sign of tax increases to come, as the Biden-Pelosi-Schumer Democrats scramble for revenue to finance their seemingly limitless expansions of government."

Psaki Says White House Would "Support A Study" Of Black Reparations.

The AP (2/17, Freking) reports the White House "is giving its support to studying reparations for Black Americans, boosting Democratic lawmakers who are renewing efforts to create a commission on the issue." White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Wednesday that President Biden "backs the idea of studying the issue...though she stopped short of saying he would sign the bill if it clears Congress." Politico (2/17, King, 6.73M) similarly says Psaki "stopp[ed] short of full-throated backing for the bill." Psaki said, "It's working its way through Congress. We'd certainly support a study, but we'll see what happens through the legislative process."

USA Today (2/17, Yancey-Bragg, 12.7M) reports the bill under consideration "would direct more than a dozen experts to examine how the U.S. government supported slavery from 1619 to 1865 and created laws that discriminated against formerly enslaved people and their descendants. The commission could recommend remedies, including compensation and education of the American public on the legacy of slavery."

USA Today Analysis: Expected Retirements Will Give Biden Chances To Put Black Women On Federal Bench.

USA Today (2/17, Fritze, 12.7M) reports, "An expected wave of retiring judges will give President Joe Biden a chance to address a startling lack of diversity on the federal bench, advocates say, a shift that eventually could have implications for future nominees to the Supreme Court." The President "repeatedly promised" during the 2020 campaign "to name a Black woman to the nation's highest court for the first time in history if a seat opens on his watch. But that commitment has drawn attention to a lack of Black women on U.S. appeals courts – the pool from which Supreme Court justices usually are drawn." There are just four Black female appeals court judges "out of 179 judgeships – all of them older than 65."

Durbin Expected To Continue GOP Policy On Judicial Nomination Blue Slips. Politico (2/17, LeVine, 6.73M) reports Senate Democrats "are planning to continue the GOP's approach to giving home-state senators veto power over lower court nominees – while granting freer rein to [Biden's] circuit court nominees." Senate Judiciary Chairman Richard Durbin's expected approach "would make no change to the so-called 'blue slip' process that Republicans changed in 2017 to yank home-state senators' power" to block then-President Donald Trump's circuit court picks.

Milley And Esper Held Back Promotion Recommendations For Female Generals Until Trump Left Office.

The New York Times (2/17, Schmitt, Cooper, 20.6M) reports that last year, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley and then-Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Gen. Mark Milley "feared that any candidates other than white men for jobs mostly held by white men might run into turmoil once their nominations got to the White House," and therefore held back recommendations on promotions for Air Force Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost and Army Lt. Gen. Laura Richardson until then-President Donald Trump had left office, "betting that" President Biden "would be more supportive."

Biden Using Twitter For "Policy, Not Personal Insults."

USA Today (2/17, Collins, 12.7M) looks at how President Biden uses social media under the headline "Policy, Not Personal Insults: Biden Uses Twitter To Sell His Agenda, With A Few Pooch Pics Thrown In." While former President Donald Trump "often used Twitter to hurl insults, settle scores and promote baseless conspiracy theories," Biden has so far "used the popular digital platform primarily to promote his policies and his political philosophy."

Senators Call On DeJoy To Address "Unacceptable Delays" In Mail Delivery.

Reuters (2/17) reports 33 senators on Wednesday "urged Postmaster General Louis DeJoy to address continuing 'unacceptable delays' in mail deliveries and questioned if his decisions are continuing to hinder mail deliveries." DeJoy "suspended operational changes in August after he came in for enormous criticism from U.S. lawmakers over delays in deliveries."

Millions Remain Without Power As Another Major Winter Storm Looms.

All three broadcast networks once again led their evening newscasts with coverage of the major winter storm that has left millions without power in Texas and other parts of the South. David Muir said on ABC World News Tonight (2/17, lead story, 4:00, 7.78M) that "another major storm [is] bearing down from the South right up into the Northeast tomorrow...and this storm has already slammed Texas yet again – another night there with millions without power, without heat, without water." Texas officials are "acknowledging they do not know when the power will be back on."

Norah O'Donnell said on the CBS Evening News (2/17, lead story, 3:50, 4.82M) that "millions of Americans [were] heading into another night of brutal cold, without heat, power or clean water. ... So many pipes have now burst" that Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) "is asking for help from out-of-state plumbers. ... More than 2.5 million Texans still don't have electricity, and with the state's energy grid buckling under the demand, it could be days before power is restored." Lester Holt said on NBC Nightly News (2/17, lead story, 2:50, 6.24M), "These are desperate hours for millions in Texas, still left in the cold from a failing power grid. They are compounded by sub-freezing temperatures, [with] only vague assurances of when the lights may go back on for good."

The AP (2/17, Weber, Bleed) reports, "Millions of Americans endured another frigid day without electricity or heat in the aftermath of a deadly winter storm as utility crews raced to restore power before another blast of snow and ice sowed more chaos in places least equipped to deal with it. Nearly 3.4 million customers around the U.S. were still without electricity, and some also lost water service." USA Today (2/17, Rice, 12.7M) reports, "At least two dozen people have died because of the intense cold and a series of storms that moved from coast to coast since the weekend."

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The Washington Post (2/17, Sonmez, 10.52M) reports that on Wednesday, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said the Administration "is supplying emergency power generators to Texas and is prepared to move diesel to the state, where about 3 million people remain in the dark amid a barrage of winter storms that have overwhelmed the electric grid." Psaki said the White House and FEMA "remain in close contact with states across the affected area to ensure any federal support requirements are met."

The Dallas Morning News (2/17, 772K) reports Abbott "has ordered Texas natural gas producers to sell the fuel to in-state power generators, part of an effort to restore electricity to millions who have been shivering in dark homes. ... But he couldn't say for sure when and where Texans could expect out their electricity to be shut on or off." The New York Times (2/17, Romero, Dobbins, 20.6M) with Texas "reeling from a rare winter storm that caused widespread power outages, Democrats have mobilized public anger over the Republicans' oversight of the energy industry, opening a new front in their battle to erode the party's dominance of every statewide office and both chambers of the legislature."

The Washington Post (2/17, 10.52M) editorializes that the Texas "weather and power crisis continued to leave millions shivering across the state Wednesday even as the state's Republican leaders seemingly lied about the reasons for the disaster." The Post calls their blaming the blackouts "on the state's supposed overreliance" on wind power "nonsense," saying "the deep freeze shut down equipment across the state to supply and burn natural gas for electricity, just as demand for electric heating surged and as demand for natural gas for home heating spiked." The Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), however, says in an editorial that it is incorrect to blame the power outages on natural gas, writing that freezing wind turbines necessitated a ramping up of gas and coal power.

Reuters (2/17, Nakamura), Bloomberg (2/17, Malik, Chediak, 3.57M), the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Ansari, Blunt, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), and the Los Angeles Times (2/17, 3.37M) are among the other sources covering the storms and the power grid issues.

Perry Says Power Outages Are Preferable To Federal Regulation. The Houston Chronicle (2/17, 982K) reports former Texas Gov. Rick Perry (R), who served as energy secretary under President Donald Trump, said Wednesday "that going days without power is a sacrifice Texans should be willing to make if it means keeping federal regulators out of the state's power grid." Perry said, "Texans would be without electricity for longer than three days to keep the federal government out of their business. Try not to let whatever the crisis of the day is take your eye off of having a resilient grid that keeps America safe personally, economically, and strategically."

Media Analyses: Trump-McConnell Feud Could Hurt GOP Prospects In 2022.

Several outlets look at the conflict between former President Donald Trump and Senate Minority Leader McConnell, arguing that the feud could impact GOP prospects in the 2022 midterm elections. The AP (2/17, Peoples, Colvin, Slodysko) says Trump "is escalating a political war within his own party that could undermine the Republican push to fight President Joe Biden's agenda and ultimately return to power." Trump "continued to attack McConnell" on Wednesday, saying in an interview, "The Republicans are soft. They only hit their own, like Mitch." Politico (2/17, Arkin, Desiderio, Isenstadt, 6.73M) says Republicans "are starting their life in the Senate minority mired in a civil war over the future of the GOP and [Trump's] role in the party."

The New York Times (2/17, Hulse, Fandos, 20.6M) says McConnell has been drawn into "a vicious feud with the former president" and widened "Republican division that could spill into the midterm elections." Some

Republicans say "the leader whose focus was always the next election had hurt the party's 2022 prospects." Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI), who has yet to decide whether he will seek reelection next year, said support for McConnell "was already emerging as a negative factor among Trump-backing Republican primary voters he speaks with back home."

The Washington Post (2/17, DeBonis, Dawsey, 10.52M) reports, "Multiple Republicans close to McConnell said he has little interest in carrying on a back-and-forth with the former president. Having said his piece about Trump's conduct after the election, McConnell has signaled he plans to focus his attention on opposing Democratic policies and ensuring the most electable Republicans emerge from Senate primaries next year." But it is unclear "just how far Trump will pursue his vendetta against McConnell."

Jamelle Bouie writes in the New York Times (2/17, 20.6M) that the fact that the backlash against the seven Republican senators who voted to convict Trump in his impeachment trial proves that there is "no truly meaningful anti-Trump opposition within the party. The civil war, such as it was, ended four-and-a-half years ago when Trump accepted the Republican nomination for president." Brian Klaas writes in the Washington Post (2/17, 10.52M), "Disqualifying, extremist behavior isn't just tolerated in the modern GOP – it's encouraged."

Barabak: Changing Times, "Talk Of Mental Decline" Drive Calls For Feinstein To Resign.

Mark Z. Barabak of the Los Angeles Times (2/17, 3.37M) writes under the headline "The Tragedy Of Dianne Feinstein" that California's senior senator, "deep into her ninth decade," is "no longer the politically revered figure she once was. There is talk of mental decline, of selfishly overstaying her time in office and calls for the Democrat to resign from the Senate for the good of her state and the country. The slow, sad fade is not simply a function of Feinstein's age – she is 87 – but also the fact that times and the political world have changed and Feinstein, whether unwilling or unable, has failed to change along with them." Barabak writes that while "today, Feinstein is a subject of scorn, considered by many a relic who is well past her prime...history, with its long view, is likely to be much kinder."

Democrat Lasry Enters Wisconsin Senate Race.

The AP (2/17, Bauer) reports, "Democrat Alex Lasry, a 33-year-old Milwaukee Bucks executive and son of a billionaire," entered the Wisconsin Senate race on Wednesday. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) has not yet said if he will seek reelection. The AP says the race "is expected to be one of the most hotly contested in the country with control of the Senate hanging in the balance." The Washington Post (2/17, Bonesteel, 10.52M) reports Lasry "served as an aide in the administration of former president Barack Obama and spearheaded Milwaukee's successful attempt to land the 2020 Democratic National Convention, which was significantly pared down because of the pandemic."

Limbaugh Dies At 70.

Conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh died Wednesday at age 70. All three broadcast networks aired lengthy reports, with Jonathan Karl saying on ABC World News Tonight (2/17, story 7, 2:40, Muir, 7.78M) that Limbaugh was "as wildly successful and influential as he was divisive and controversial," and called him "the godfather of the offend anyone, apologize to no one politics that got Donald Trump elected president." On the CBS Evening News (2/17, story 7, 1:50, O'Donnell, 4.82M), Jim Axelrod called Limbaugh "one of the loudest, most provocative voices on the national scene in the last three-plus decades." Geoff Bennett said on NBC

Nightly News (2/17, story 9, 1:25, Holt, 6.24M) that his "self-titled show was the most listened to radio talk show in America."

The New York Times (2/17, A1, McFadden, Grynbaum, 20.6M) calls Limbaugh "the right-wing radio megastar whose slashing, divisive style of mockery and grievance reshaped American conservatism," while USA Today (2/17, Ali, 12.7M) calls him a "conservative radio talk titan." The Washington Post (2/17, Fisher, 10.52M) says Limbaugh "deployed comic bombast and relentless bashing of liberals, feminists and environmentalists to become the nation's most popular radio talk-show host and lead the Republican Party into a politics of anger and obstruction." In an editorial, the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says Limbaugh "was invaluable to the conservative movement in the 1990s" and "kept his sense of humor and rarely let anger drown his fundamental optimism about the United States. ... Limbaugh knew he was an entertainer, not an intellectual or politician, and he said so many times."

Former President Donald Trump spoke with Fox News' Hannity (2/17, 535K) about Limbaugh, saying, "Our country is a great place and we are going to make it even greater, as the expression goes. But we have a lot to talk about but today is all about Rush, don't you think?" The AP (2/17, Sedensky), Reuters (2/17, Dunham), the Wall Street Journal (2/17, Steele, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), the Los Angeles Times (2/17, 3.37M), Axios (2/17, 1.26M), Politico (2/17, Cohen, 6.73M), The Hill (2/17, 5.69M), and the CNN (2/17, Stelter, 89.21M) and Fox News (2/17, Flood, 23.99M) websites are among the sources covering Limbaugh's death.

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Subject: ACTIV Vaccine WG roster
Attachments: Vaccines WG members.docx; Clinical Trials Subgroup of ACTIV Vaccines WG.docx

Hi all,

Attached is the current roster of the ACTIV Vaccines Working Group. There is a lot of expertise represented, from both public and private sectors. This group could be reconvened at any time to address the important questions we discussed yesterday morning.

There is also a wider group of people that have been part of a Clinical Trials Sub-Group, and I attach that roster also.

Francis

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TO: THE SECRETARY AND SENIOR STAFF

DATE: FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2020 7:30 AM EST

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• Article Examines Possibility Of Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccinations.
• US Reportedly Lacks Safeguards To Ensure COVID-19 Vaccine Doses Are Administered To Most At-Risk Patients, Critical Workers.

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- Approval For Moderna's COVID-19 Shot Would Boost Vaccination Efforts.
- Incarcerated Populations Hit Hard By COVID-19.
- Covid And The Rebirth Of US Industrial Policy (Fauci Mention).
- Columnist Muses On Lessons Learned From Lewis And Clark Expedition For Pandemic Winter.

HHS in the News

- CDC Estimates A Record 81,000 People Died From Drug Overdoses In 12-Month Period.
- CDC Says Underage Tobacco Use Is Down.
- CMS Unveils New Initiative Which Aims To Improve Care Coordination For Dual Eligibles.
- Former FDA Chief Gottlieb Hails Rollback Of Frozen Cherry Pie Regulations.
- CISA Says Likely Russian Cyberattack Compromised Agencies, Including NIH, And "Critical Infrastructure."
- Fauci To Get An Honorary Degree From Bowdoin.
- NIH Changes Conflicts Of Interest Rules To Address Concerns About Foreign Influence.
- Research Examines Liver's Zones Of Immune Defense.
- Opinion: Postponing Routine Care Can Have A "Deadly Cost."

Opioid Crisis

- Sackler Family Members Denounced In Appearances Before House Panel.

Health Care & Insurance Reform

- Number Of Marylanders Who Enrolled In ACA Plans Hit New Record For 2021.
- Congressional Lawmakers Decide Not To Include Provisions Against Anticompetitive Practices In Healthcare Year-End Proposal.
- Washington State Governor Proposes Tax On Health Insurers, Capital Gains Tax To Offset Budget Shortfall.

Human Services News

- DOT Ruling Says Only Dogs Qualify As Service Animals.
- Financially-Stressed Child Welfare Contractor Spent $80,000 On Baseball Tickets, Whistleblower Says.
- Reports Of Child Abuse In Massachusetts Fall Sharply During Pandemic.
- Research Shows Rising IQ In Children With Autism.
- Navy Hires Attorneys To Take Part In Pilot Program For Families With Dependents With Special-Needs.

Food & Import Safety

- Tesoros Trading Co Recalls Some Frozen Lightly Salted Edamame Over Potential Listeria Contamination.

Medicaid & CHIP

- Florida Could See Medicaid Shortfall Of $1.25B Next Year Due To Increased Enrollment, Economists Say.
- "Arcane Legislative Rules" Prevent Ohio Medicaid Director From Testifying Online About PBMs.

Health & Medical News

- Biogen Agrees To Pay $22 Million To Settle US Drug Charity Kickback Investigation.
- US Labs Seeing Far Less Influenza Than In Past Years.
- Over 370 International Spiritual Leaders Sign Joint Declaration Calling For End To LGBTQ Conversion Therapy.
- Pulse Oximeters May Be More Likely To Give Inaccurate Readings For Black People, Researchers Say.
- Toxic Fumes Appear To Leak Into Airplane Air Supply More Frequently Than Previously Thought, Research Indicates.
- FDA Warns Consumers Not To Use Nearly 50 Male Enhancing, Weight Loss Products Sold Online.
- Hospitals Introducing AI Without Educating Employees About It.
- Former J&J Executive Files Sexual Discrimination And Harassment Suit.
- Opinion: Congress Pursuing Contradictory Messaging In Approaches To Marijuana, Nicotine.

Global Health

- Spain's Parliament Approves Bill To Allow Physician-Assisted Suicide For Long-Suffering Patients Of Incurable Diseases.
- Opinion: Family Planning, Basic Health Services Investments Needed To Prevent Maternal Deaths Around Globe.

National News

- Trump Reiterates His Intention To Veto NDAA.
- NYTimes Analysis: Trump Judges More Conservative Than Other GOP-Appointed Peers.
- Tuberville Could Join House Members In Effort To Contest Electoral Vote Count.
- Rice Defeats Ocasio-Cortez For Energy And Commerce Seat.
- Pence Campaigns For GOP Senate Candidates In Georgia.
- GOP Could Have Flipped House With Fewer Than 32,000 Votes In Key Districts.
- Biden Chooses Haaland For Interior Secretary.

Editorial Wrap-Up

- Washington Post.
- Wall Street Journal.

The Big Picture

- Headlines From Today's Front Pages.

Last Laughs

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Leading the News

FDA Panel Recommends Authorization Of Moderna's COVID-19 Vaccine For Emergency Use.

On its front page, the New York Times (12/17, A1, Grady, Goodnough, Zimmer, Wu, 20.6M) reports "the coronavirus vaccine made by Moderna moved closer to authorization on Thursday, a significant step that would expand the reach of the nation's vaccination campaign to rural areas and many more hospitals." A panel of "experts recommended, by a vote of 20 in favor and one abstention, that the Food and Drug Administration authorize the Moderna vaccine for emergency use." The move "would clear the way for some 5.9 million doses to be shipped around the country starting this weekend." The decision is "expected on Friday." The Times adds that "Moderna developed its vaccine in collaboration with scientists from the National Institutes of Health."

On its front page, the Washington Post (12/17, A1, Johnson, McGinley, 10.52M) reports the FDA "said Thursday night that it will 'rapidly work toward' emergency authorization of Moderna's coronavirus vaccine, just hours after agency advisers endorsed the shot." The panel of advisers determined "the benefits of the highly effective vaccine outweighed its risks for people 18 years of age and older." The federal agency "intends to authorize the vaccine Friday, according to knowledgeable individuals." The agency "authorized the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine last Friday, hours after White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows warned FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn he would be asked to submit his resignation if the agency didn't authorize the shot by the end of that day."

USA Today (12/17, Weintraub, 12.7M) reports "the independent Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee voted 20-0 with one abstention to support mRNA-1273." Steven Pergam, a committee member and infectious disease and vaccine expert at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, said, "There's no doubt in my mind – it looks like the benefits outweigh the risks from what I've seen."

The AP (12/17, Perrone, Neergaard) reports Hahn "said late Thursday that his agency will move...quickly" to "authorize the second COVID-19 vaccine to fight the pandemic." He "said in a statement that regulators have communicated their plans to drugmaker Moderna." Once the "FDA's emergency use authorization is granted, Moderna will begin shipping millions of doses, earmarked for health workers and nursing home residents, to boost the largest vaccination effort in U.S. history."

NBC News (12/17, Edwards, 4.91M) reports Melinda Wharton, Director of the Immunization Services Division in the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the CDC, said, "Based on the totality of scientific evidence available, I strongly support it because the benefits outweigh its risks." Meanwhile, "Michael Kurilla, an infectious disease expert with the National Institutes of Health, was the sole member to abstain from the vote." Kurilla "said he felt the question on which the committee voted, 'Based on the totality of scientific evidence available, do the benefits of the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine outweigh its risks for use in individuals 18 years of age and older?' was too broad."

CNBC (12/17, Lovelace, 7.34M) reports that before "the vote, some members of the committee stressed that their endorsement for Moderna's vaccine was not for a full FDA approval, reiterating that the agency will still need to review more data on safety and effectiveness." Doran Fink, Deputy Director of FDA's division of vaccines and related products applications, said, "As we

continue to investigate and evaluate the data, we will consider whether additional recommendations need to be made."

CNN (12/17, Watts, Christensen, Fox, 89.21M) reports Hahn and Peter Marks, director of the FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, said, "Following today's positive advisory committee meeting outcome regarding the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has informed the sponsor that it will rapidly work toward finalization and issuance of an emergency use authorization. ... The agency has also notified the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Operation Warp Speed, so they can execute their plans for timely vaccine distribution."

Fox News (12/17, Farber, 23.99M) reports "a panel of independent experts advising the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently voted that health care workers and residents of long-term care facilities will be the first to receive the long-awaited coronavirus vaccine. That decision required approval from CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield."

The New York Post (12/17, Moore, 7.45M) reports "the Trump administration has secured nearly 6 million doses of Moderna's vaccine for immediate release, Heath and Human Services head Alex Azar said on Wednesday."

STAT (12/17, 262K) reports "Rachel Zhang, an FDA medical officer who is presenting the agency's analysis of the Moderna data to VRBPAC, reported that two people developed facial swelling after vaccination; both had a prior history of getting cosmetic injections of dermal fillers in their cheeks."

Among other news outlets reporting on the story are ABC World News Tonight (12/17, lead story, 4:20, Muir, 7.31M), NBC Nightly News (12/17, lead story, 2:50, Holt, 6.27M), the Wall Street Journal (12/17, A1, Burton, Loftus, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), Bloomberg (12/17, Edney, 3.57M), Reuters (12/17, Kalia), a second Reuters (12/17, Mishra, Maddipatla) piece, Fox Business (12/17, Barrabi, 3.06M), McClatchy (12/17, Camero, 29K), Forbes (12/17, Rosenbaum, 10.33M), Politico (12/17, Owermohle, 6.73M), NPR (12/17, Hensley, 3.69M), The Hill (12/17, Weixel, 5.69M), the Washington Times (12/17, Howell Jr., 626K), Vox (12/17, Irfan, 1.88M), the New York Daily News (12/17, Sommerfeldt, 2.51M), the Boston Herald (12/17, Cohan, 327K), the Daily Caller (12/17, Trunsky, 375K), the Atlanta Journal-Constitution (12/17, Lee, 1.46M), the San Francisco Chronicle (12/17, Ho, 2.44M), the Boston Business Journal (12/17, DeAngelis, Subscription Publication, 881K), National Review (12/17, Bernstein, 798K), Axios (12/17, Gonzalez, 1.26M), BioPharma Dive (12/17, Pagliarulo), FierceBiotech (12/17, Al Idrus, 4K), and the Financial Times (12/17, Stacey, Kuchler, Subscription Publication, 1.48M).

Lawmakers Pushing To Finalize $900B COVID-19 Stimulus Package, But Negotiations Expected To Continue Into The Weekend.

On its front page, the Washington Post (12/17, A1, DeBonis, Stein, Kim, 10.52M) reports White House officials and top lawmakers in Congress are attempting "to address a number of lingering policy disagreements as they race to finalize an approximately $900 billion coronavirus relief package, with growing signs that the talks will drag into the weekend." Some of the most contentious issues are "whether to curb the powers of the Federal Reserve and how to structure a

new round of stimulus checks." In addition, negotiators are "clashing over...aid for theaters and music venues and relief for cities and states, among other things."

The AP (12/17, Taylor) reports, "It's a hurry up and wait moment on Capitol Hill as congressional negotiators on a must-pass, almost $1 trillion COVID-19 economic relief package struggled through a handful of remaining snags on Thursday." These "holdups mean a weekend session now appears virtually certain, and a top lawmaker warned that a government shutdown this weekend can't be ruled out." Negotiators seemed "hopeful that the wrangling wouldn't derail the legislation." The deal includes "more than $300 billion in aid to businesses; a $300-per-week bonus federal jobless benefit and renewal of soon-to-expire state benefits; $600 direct payments to individuals; vaccine distribution funds and money for renters, schools, the Postal Service and people needing food aid."

The CBS Evening News (12/17, story 4, 2:20, O'Donnell, 4.49M) reported that "congressional leaders insist they're close to a deal for pandemic relief, and" and details are emerging about "the next round of stimulus checks that could soon be going out to millions of Americans."

CNN (12/17, Raju, Foran, 89.21M) reports, "It's growing increasingly unlikely that Congress will be able to get the long-awaited plan through both chambers by Friday night when a government shutdown looms." Therefore, "lawmakers are now discussing the possibility of extending the shutdown deadline, again, to allow more time for negotiations to lock down a deal and push it through the House and Senate. The two issues are tied together since leaders want to tie the relief deal to a $1.4 trillion funding bill to keep the government open through next September."

Reuters (12/17, Cornwell, Cowan) reports that the latest surge in COVID-19 cases "lit a fire in the U.S. Congress, where Republicans and Democrats were scrambling to pass a new round of aid after months of partisan finger-pointing and inaction." While they considered "passing a third stopgap measure to give them a few more days to agree on final amounts, lawmakers from both parties said COVID-19's worsening toll meant that failure to agree was no longer an option."

The New York Times (12/17, A1, Tankersley, Cochrane, 20.6M) reports on its front page, "As lawmakers race to put the final touches on a $900 billion bipartisan stimulus package, one thing is becoming clear: Congress has left a significant challenge for" the next Administration. In order to finalize "the deal after months of struggle, lawmakers agreed to exclude a direct stream of money for state and local governments, which Republicans objected to as a blue state 'bailout' but Democrats said was needed to prevent job cuts and economic pain." The article says experts "warn that, without further help, states and cities could further slow the economic recovery by cutting more jobs and spending."

Among other news outlets covering the story are ABC World News Tonight (12/17, story 4, 1:05, Muir, 7.31M), NBC Nightly News (12/17, story 3, 1:25, Holt, 6.27M), the Wall Street Journal (12/17, Duehren, Peterson, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), Politico (12/17, Caygle, Everett, Sherman, 6.73M), and another Politico (12/17, Everett, Desiderio, Levine, 6.73M) article.

US COVID-19 Surge Continues With Record 3,656 Daily Deaths.

ABC World News Tonight (12/17, story 2, 2:40, Muir, 7.31M) reported the preceding 24 hours were "the pandemic's deadliest day. More than 3,600 fatalities." ABC reports the CDC is "now predicting as many as 82,000 more deaths in the next three weeks. And California is now the nation's new epicenter. Nearly 150,000 cases just the past three days."

The CBS Evening News (12/17, lead story, 4:10, O'Donnell, 4.49M) reported the "numbers are simply staggering: more than 3,600 Americans dead, 113,000 in hospitals, and nearly 250,000 people infected, and that's just in 24 hours," saying cases have "more than doubled...in two months, from 8.1 million on October 17 to more than 17 million tonight." NBC Nightly News (12/17, story 2, 2:30, Holt, 6.27M) reported Southern California "is on the brink of disaster, a region home to 23 million people and the country's second largest city, now reporting no open ICU beds."

Reuters (12/17, Heavey) reports the "unrelenting" spike in cases has "pushed hospitals further to their limits as the United States pressed on with its immunization rollout on Thursday and prepared to ship nearly 6 million doses of a new vaccine on the cusp of winning regulatory approval." Reuters reports hospitalizations have broken records for 19 days running, adding that COVID-19 "has claimed almost 308,000 lives in the United States to date, the most in the world."

Forbes (12/17, McEvoy, 10.33M) reports the US "has set a record for the highest number of coronavirus-linked deaths reported in a single day" three times this month, "adding an unprecedented 3,656 new victims to its growing toll on Wednesday." As the surge intensifies, "the U.S. has begun its rollout of the newly approved Pfizer and BioNTech coronavirus vaccine to the country's most vulnerable populations. However, it is not expected that the general population will start receiving doses until April, with top infectious diseases expert Dr. Anthony Fauci predicting that 'some level of normality' will come by fall if between 75% and 85% agree to take the vaccine."

Also reporting are The Hill (12/17, Coleman, 5.69M) and the New York Post (12/17, Fitz-Gibbon, 7.45M).

States Complain They Are Getting Fewer Doses Of Vaccine Than Expected; HHS Denies Reports Of Reductions.

The New York Times (12/17, Thomas, LaFraniere, 20.6M) reports that officials in several states "said that they were caught off guard on Wednesday when they learned that next week's shipment of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine would contain fewer doses than the first week." Officials with Operation Warp Speed, "the federal effort to distribute a Covid-19 vaccine to the public, also said Wednesday that they had allocated only 2 million doses for next week's shipment, less than the 2.9 million that were delivered this week." The officials "said they expect to ship 5.9 million doses next week of a vaccine developed by Moderna, which is expected to be authorized by the Food and Drug Administration on Friday."

NBC News (12/17, Siemaszko, 4.91M) reports, "Several governors have reported that half as many Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine shots as expected are going to be delivered in the next few weeks and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has suggested that Pfizer is having manufacturing problems." HHS, however, "released a statement Thursday denying the number of doses are being reduced." An

HHS spokesperson said in a statement: "Reports that jurisdictions' allocations are being reduced are incorrect. As was done with the initial shipments of Pfizer vaccine, jurisdictions will receive vaccine at different sites over several days."

CNN (12/17, Kaufman, Alvarez, Murray, 89.21M) reports "officials in numerous states including Iowa, Illinois, Washington, Michigan and Oregon have said that they have been recently told they would receive fewer doses than originally planned for by...Operation Warp Speed." The delay's cause "remains unclear to many."

McClatchy (12/17, Wilner, 29K) reports "a Pentagon system set up for states to keep track of coronavirus vaccines had outdated, inaccurate projections for deliveries that misled governors into expecting they would receive far more doses than will arrive in the coming days, a federal official told McClatchy." The official said, "Tiberius has been online for a couple of months, and it's where a lot of the exercise and planning modules were where they could see potential allocations. ... The problem is that they kept those exercising and planning modules in there, and that's what people were looking at as late as last week."

The Portland (ME) Press Herald (12/17, Hoey, 174K) reports "all four members of Maine's congressional delegation...were asked Thursday evening what steps they were taking to ensure that Maine receives the vaccine shipments it was told to expect. The delegation's offices sent a joint statement expressing concern and saying they are united to make sure Maine receives its fair share of doses." The statement said, "As the Maine Delegation wrote in their letter to (U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex) Azar last week, states must receive immediate and greater clarity from the Department of Health and Human Services when significant changes are made to projected COVID-19 vaccine allotments."

Also reporting are the Washington Post (12/17, Stanley-Becker, Abutaleb, Sun, 10.52M), the AP (12/17, Salter, Alonso-Zaldivar), The Hill (12/17, Wilson, 5.69M), Newsweek (12/17, Czachor, 2.67M), Axios (12/17, 1.26M), the Miami Herald (12/17, 647K), the Hartford (CT) Courant (12/17, Brindley, 438K), the Reno (NV) Gazette-Journal (12/17, Adami, 219K), the San Francisco Chronicle (12/17, Gardiner, 2.44M), and the Financial Times (12/17, Subscription Publication, 1.48M).

Pfizer Says Company Not Experiencing COVID-19 Vaccine Production Problems, Has Millions Of Doses In Warehouses.

Bloomberg (12/17, Griffin, Wingrove, 3.57M) reports "Pfizer Inc. pushed back on claims it is experiencing problems producing its Covid-19 vaccine, as the company and the federal government continued to try to reach a deal that would eventually double the number of doses available for the U.S.'s vast immunization effort." Operation Warp Speed chief scientific adviser Moncef Slaoui "said in an interview on Thursday that the U.S. is close to a deal for another 100 million doses of the vaccine Pfizer developed in partnership with BioNTech SE." US officials and Pfizer "have been at odds after reports that the government declined" an "offer to buy more doses, and that Pfizer would need to fulfill commitments to other countries before it could get more stock to the U.S."

Reuters (12/17) reports similarly that Pfizer "said on Thursday it was not facing any production issues with its COVID-19 vaccine, a day after U.S. officials pointed to challenges with the company's manufacturing." Pfizer "said it was confident in its ability to deliver up to 50 million doses globally this year and up to 1.3 billion next year." The company "had reported some production issues with the vaccine, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar said on Wednesday."

Forbes (12/17, Rosenbaum, 10.33M) reports that "in a press release issued Thursday, Pfizer said that the company has millions of doses of its Covid-19 vaccines sitting in warehouses that have not been delivered because the company has not received shipping instructions from the federal government." Pfizer "said that it hasn't experienced any production issues or shipping delays in regards to its vaccine."

The Hill (12/17, Weixel, 5.69M) reports the company "said none of its coronavirus vaccine shipments are delayed or on hold." Pfizer "said that this week it 'successfully shipped all 2.9 million doses that we were asked to ship by the U.S. Government to the locations specified by them.'"

Fox Business (12/17, Best, 3.06M) reports Azar said to CNBC on Thursday, "It's been going smoothly so far, there are going to be hiccups though. ... Gen. [Gustave] Perna talked about how we had a couple of shipments where there was an excursion of temperature that went actually below the cold limit to minus 92."

HuffPost (12/17, Papenfuss, 363K) reports "HHS spokesperson Michael Pratt insisted...there have been no cuts to the number of vaccine doses 'locked in' to the states and that the nation was still on track to [vaccinate] 20 million people with the first doses of the two-dose regimen by the end of the year."

The CBS Evening News (12/17, story 2, 2:30, O'Donnell, 4.49M) also reported on the story.

The Secretary in the News

Azar Wants "More Visibility" Into Pfizer's Manufacturing Process For Its COVID-19 Vaccine.

CNBC (12/17, Lovelace, 7.34M) reports that on Thursday, HHS Secretary Alex Azar said "he'd like 'more visibility' into the manufacturing of Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine, adding the U.S. drugmaker has kept the federal government at 'arm's length' throughout the process." Contrary to "other drugmakers, Pfizer did not accept federal funding to help develop or manufacture its vaccine." The company "has a deal with the U.S. to supply 100 million doses of its vaccine as part of Operation Warp Speed." Azar stated, "'They are part of Operation Warp Speed, but...it's a different relationship' from the government's deals with Moderna and other pharmaceutical companies that took federal funding." He added, "We contract, give [Pfizer] a guaranteed purchase, that allows them to make capital investments, have a predictable purchaser, but we don't have complete visibility into their manufacturing because they have kept that a bit more arm's length."

Fox News (12/17, Rivas, 23.99M) reports that Azar outlined "some 'hiccups' that have cropped up during distribution of Pfizer's recently approved COVID-19 vaccine." He "reiterated

comments that the complexity with Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine does not lie in the subfreezing storage requirements." Azar "said hospitals are well equipped to manage the storage requirements to keep up with the vaccines' cold chain."

CNBC's Squawk Box (12/17, 104K) carried the interview. Reuters (12/17, Heavey) also covers the story.

Azar Informs HHS Staff That His Wife Has Tested Positive For COVID-19.

Politico (12/17, Diamond, 6.73M) reports that on Thursday night, HHS Secretary Alex Azar "informed staff that his wife, Jennifer, tested positive for Covid-19, according to an email shared by HHS." The email stated, "Today, my family learned that my wife Jennifer has tested positive for Covid-19." Azar "added that his wife 'scrupulously followed public health guidelines' and immediately self-isolated after her initial symptoms and even after she received a negative diagnosis from an initial instant test." A second test revealed she was positive. Azar said he and children have no symptoms, and they have tested negative. He wrote, "I will be carrying out the duties of my office while strictly adhering to CDC guidelines for essential workers, continuing to practice social distancing, wearing a mask and monitoring for any symptoms."

Among other news outlets covering the story are Bloomberg (12/18, Wingrove, Jacobs, 3.57M), CNN (12/17, Murray, Kelly, 89.21M) and The Hill (12/17, Jenkins, 5.69M).

HHS Allocating $24.5B To Providers Fighting COVID-19 Pandemic.

RevCycle Intelligence (12/17, LaPointe) reports, "HHS, through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), has completed review of Phase 3 Provider Relief Fund applications and will start distributing payments to over 70,000 providers." HHS announced it "will distribute $24.5 billion to providers who applied and were accepted as part of the Phase 3 distribution. The funding is up from the $20 billion originally planned to go out to providers." HHS Secretary Alex Azar is quoted as saying, "HHS is providing more than $24 billion in new relief to more than 70,000 healthcare providers, meeting close to 90 percent of the losses they've reported from the COVID-19 pandemic in the first half of the year. ... With the Provider Relief Fund, we've been able to support providers hardest hit by COVID-19, including safety net hospitals, rural providers, and nursing homes, helping ensure they can continue serving their communities during and beyond the pandemic."

Healthcare Finance News (12/17, Morse, 93K) also covers the story.

Moderna Vaccine Set To Ship Amid Record Number Of COVID-19 Deaths.

Reuters (12/17, Heavey) reports the US was "ready to ship 5.9 million doses of a new coronavirus vaccine" Thursday, as the FDA was poised to grant Moderna's candidate emergency use authorization as early as Friday, "just as the nation suffered its highest daily COVID-19 death toll with 3,580 lives lost." Amid the worsening crisis, "an FDA panel of outside advisers is weighing the safety and effectiveness of Moderna's vaccine candidate. ... Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar told CNBC on Thursday that 5.9 million Moderna doses, or enough to inoculate half that many people, had been allotted for state governors and were ready to ship nationwide."

Analysis: "Small Signs Of Functioning Government" Appearing As Lawmakers Negotiate COVID-19 Relief Package.

In an analysis, CNN (12/17, Reston, 89.21M) says that "for the first time in months there were small signs of a functioning government Wednesday as congressional leaders negotiated a Covid-19 relief package and millions of vaccine doses were shipped out under the watchful eye of officials with Operation Warp Speed in the midst of a winter storm." Although "the stimulus deal could still falter...it was a glimmer of hope for progress after four years in which President Donald Trump has sowed dysfunction at every turn and completely abdicated his responsibility for stopping the terrifying spread of coronavirus." CNN adds that HHS Secretary "Alex Azar was not able to estimate Wednesday how many people have been vaccinated so far with the Pfizer and BioNTech vaccine." Meanwhile, Adm. Brett Giroir, assistant secretary for health at HHS, "said he was 'very confident' that the Moderna vaccine will receive authorization."

Uber Offering 10M Free, Discounted Rides In Effort To Boost COVID-19 Vaccinations.

USA Today (12/17, Murphy, 12.7M) reports "Uber will offer 10 million free or discounted rides to people looking to receive the COVID-19 vaccination." The rides being offered "include transportation to and from their destination, as well as rides for their second and final dose." However, "a date for when the offer will begin rolling out is still not set, according to Uber."

Fox Business (12/17, Manfredi, 3.06M) reports Uber CEO Dara Khosrowshahi said, "We hope our technology can help make the largest-ever global immunization campaign a success and deliver the benefits of the vaccine quickly, effectively and equitably." The campaign "will be in partnership with the National Urban League, the Morehouse School of Medicine, and the National Action Network in order to help communities of color that have been disproportionately hurt by the pandemic." HHS "Secretary Alex Azar said last week that the Trump administration expects to distribute up to 20 million doses of Pfizer and BioNTech's vaccine by the end of this year."

Coronavirus

Operation Warp Speed

Illinois Senator Praises Operation Warp Speed's Vaccine Rollout.

Fox News (12/17, Fordham, 23.99M) reports that Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL), "a top critic of President Trump, gave the administration praise as a second COVID-19 vaccine tied to Operation Warp Speed is expected to receive emergency use authorization from the FDA." Durbin said on the Senate floor Thursday: "Although I've been a frequent critic of this administration, I want to give them credit for organizing this effectively, and delivering a vaccine in a timely way, almost amazing timely way in this pandemic that we face." Earlier in the year, Durbin "cast doubt on Trump's efforts to ensure the development of a vaccine before 2021."

Other Coronavirus News

New Filings For Unemployment Rose To 885,000 Last Week, Data Show.

The Washington Post (12/17, Rosenberg, 10.52M) reports some "885,000 people applied for unemployment aid for the first time last week – a second consecutive week of increased claims, and a high not seen since the end of the summer, as negotiations for stimulus funding continue in Washington." Data also show "455,000 new claims for the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program for gig and self-employed workers." The article says approximately "20.6 million people were counted on the unemployment rolls as of the week ending Nov. 28, although officials say that number is inflated by duplicate claims and other issues stemming from backlogs in state unemployment systems."

The AP (12/17, Wiseman) reports that the number of Americans "who are receiving traditional state unemployment benefits fell to 5.5 million from 5.8 million. That figure is down sharply from its peak of nearly 23 million in May." This "means that some jobless Americans are finding jobs and no longer receiving aid." However, "it also indicates that many of the unemployed have used up their state benefits, which typically expire after six months."

The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Cambon, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) and Bloomberg (12/17, Pickert, 3.57M) also cover the story.

Trump Was Reportedly Pushing For Stimulus Checks For As Much As $2,000 Per Person.

The Washington Post (12/17, Stein, 10.52M) reports that on Thursday, White House aides prevented "President Trump from issuing a statement calling for substantially larger stimulus payments for millions of Americans, according to two people granted anonymity to share details of the private exchange." During "a phone call Thursday afternoon, Trump told allies that he believes stimulus payments in the next relief package should be 'at least' $1,200 per person and possibly as big as $2,000 per person, the officials said." Top lawmakers in Congress are "currently preparing a stimulus package that would provide checks of $600 per person."

Analysis: Lack Of State, Local Aid In COVID-19 Stimulus Package Will Likely Result In More Damage To The Economy.

The Washington Post (12/17, Hohmann, 10.52M) reports that "after nine months of dithering and deadlock, President Trump and Congress appear poised to enact desperately needed relief before leaving town for their Christmas vacations." The article says, "The $908 billion bipartisan proposal that was released earlier this week by a group of moderates would not have authorized another round of stimulus checks, but it would have included $160 billion in aid for states and cities who have seen tax revenue dry up amid the pandemic." The piece adds that the "failure to provide meaningful help for state and local governments will mean significant layoffs of public employees and reduce services at a time when there is growing demand for public assistance," which "will make the job picture bleaker and increase the pain for the neediest."

Analysis: Stimulus Checks In Next COVID-19 Stimulus Package Not Enough To Pay Average Month's Rent In Any State.

Newsweek (12/17, Cannon, 2.67M) reports there is growing speculation that "$600 stimulus checks could be included in the next COVID-19 relief package – however, that would not be enough to cover most people's rent." That "figure is said to be under consideration as lawmakers look to formulate a proposal able to pass both the House and Senate after a prolonged stalemate." But a "separate analysis of the latest American Community Survey from 2017 by Business Insider suggests the sum would not be enough to cover the average rent for an average American family of four in any state."

Commentary Examines GOP's, Dems' Motivations In Negotiating COVID-19 Stimulus Package.

Spencer Bokat-Lindell writes in the New York Times (12/17, 20.6M) that "eight months after Congress cut the first stimulus checks to help Americans absorb the shock of a pandemic-induced recession, it's finally making plans for a second round." Some contend Republicans want a smaller bill "because they want to saddle the Biden presidency with a halting recovery." In addition, because Senate Majority Leader Mitch "McConnell's newfound motivation to pass a bill appears linked to the Georgia runoffs," they say "Republicans will be much more resistant next year to economic relief if they retain control of the Senate." But others "blame Democrats for not taking the $1.8 trillion deal the White House offered in October, if only to weaponize Republican opposition to it before the election."

Commentary: McConnell May Be Undermining Biden By Omitting Aid For State, Local Governments From Stimulus Package.

Greg Sargent writes in the Washington Post (12/17, 10.52M) that "as congressional negotiators inch toward a deal on an economic rescue package, Republicans appear close to accomplishing one of their most cherished goals: keeping federal aid to state and local governments out of the deal." Sargent says "it's understandable that state and local aid has been put aside for now." Yet, "in getting this done, [Senate Majority Leader Mitch] McConnell may be doing more than it first appears to accomplish his apparent goal of undermining Joe Biden's presidency."

Commentary Says Dems Opposed Liability Shield In COVID-19 Stimulus Package Because "Personal Injury Lawyers Won't Allow It."

Marc A. Thiessen writes in the Washington Post (12/17, 10.52M) that amid negotiations on the COVID-19 stimulus package, "instead of compromising on liability reform, Democrats threw state and local governments under the bus. Last spring, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) drew a red line, declaring that Democrats would approve no more covid relief packages without aid to state and local governments. Republicans opposed the aid because they believed Democrats were using the pandemic as a pretext to bail out blue states for decades of high spending and fiscal mismanagement." Thiessen says in order to get what she wanted, Pelosi "would have to compromise on liability reform, and the personal injury lawyers won't allow it." He adds, "That is stunning. In all my many years in Washington, I've never seen a constituency with such total dominance over a political party. There are no votes at stake here; it's all about money."

Commentary Urges Congress To Pass COVID-19 Stimulus Package And Immediately Begin Work On The Next One.

Catherine Rampell writes in the Washington Post (12/17, 10.52M) that following "months of deadlock, lawmakers are inching toward a compromise on another round of fiscal relief. The deal reportedly includes more aid for the unemployed and small businesses and a second round of stimulus payments, among other measures, with a total price tag of about $900 billion." The agreement "couldn't come a moment too soon." Rampell says "it's great that leaders of both parties seem to (finally) recognize their duty to forestall the most immediate catastrophe, that post-Christmas benefit cliff." However, "their work isn't finished. Sometime in the next few weeks or months, lawmakers must take another bite at the apple before it rots."

LATimes: McConnell Most Likely Prodded By Partisan Interests To Negotiate On COVID-19 Relief Package.

The Los Angeles Times (12/17, 3.37M) writes in an editorial that some "eight months after Congress passed a massive coronavirus relief bill, lawmakers are closing in on a deal for a long-awaited follow-up: a roughly $900-billion package that would aid struggling small businesses, renters, workers and schools, while also pumping more money into fighting COVID-19." The Times says, "We'd like to believe that the looming end to extended unemployment benefits was enough to prod [Senate Majority Leader Mitch] McConnell into action." However, he was probably motivated by the fact that the two Georgia senators facing re-election have been criticized for opposing COVID-19 for consumers, and their defeat in the runoffs would mean "Republicans will lose control of the Senate."

Giroir Urges Americans To Continue Taking Precautions Despite Authorization Of Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine.

Healthcare Finance News (12/17, Hackett, 93K) reports that in spite of "the promising outlook provided by the Pfizer and BioNTech vaccine rollout that began earlier this week, officials insist that it is just as critical as ever to take safety measures in preventing the spread of COVID-19." Dr. Admiral Brett Giroir, assistant secretary for Health at HHS, said, "While we're in the process of immunizing the American people, we must keep our guard up. ... We must continue our critical mitigation steps and you know what they are, the three W's: Wear a mask, watch your distance, wash your hands."

Analysis: Trump Fighting To Cling To Presidency, But Not Fighting COVID-19.

A CNN (12/18, Reston, 89.21M) analysis asks "what President Donald Trump [is] doing in the waning days of his presidency as the number of Covid-19 deaths in the US soared past 3,000 each day." The piece says he has spent most of the recent weeks "plotting how to nullify the results of President-elect Joe Biden's November victory," but "has been silent" on important national issues. "Perhaps most baffling about Trump's disappearance, he has stayed out of the public eye when he could have taken a victory lap following the US Food and Drug Administration's historic

authorization of the first Covid-19 vaccine." The article concludes with a section on the FDA's expected approval of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine candidate, citing a Thursday statement from FDA Commissioner Dr. Stephen Hahn and Dr. Peter Marks, director of the FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research.

California Rocked By Record Surge In COVID-19 Cases.

The Washington Post (12/17, Thebault, 10.52M) reports California has become "the new epicenter of the U.S. coronavirus crisis, with unprecedented surges of seriously infected patients threatening to overwhelm hospitals and overflow morgues." The state "has set nationwide records for new cases again and again in the past week," and if it "were a country, it would be among the world leaders in new coronavirus cases, ahead of India, Germany and Britain. ... California is also setting daily death records," and "the number of available beds in intensive care units is plummeting."

The Los Angeles Times (12/16, 3.37M) reports, "Single-day pandemic records were shattered across California yet again on Wednesday," with "more than 50,000 new coronavirus cases and nearly 400 deaths in California reported in a single day." The state "is now tallying an average of 203 COVID-19 deaths a day over a weekly period, and 35,200 cases a day – both records, and both quadruple the numbers from mid-November." From behind a paywall, Bloomberg (12/17, 3.57M) reports that Los Angeles has emerged as the US metro area most severely impacted by COVID-19.

The San Francisco Chronicle (12/18, Asmiov, 2.44M) reports as the state reported a surge in daily COVID-19 fatalities, "San Francisco imposed a 10-day quarantine on travelers arriving from outside the region. ... With the frightening trends Thursday came hope, however, as Bay Area hospitals vaccinated hundreds of health care workers, and the FDA's independent advisory panel said that another vaccine, by Moderna, should be approved for adults."

Analysis Of Virus Levels In California Sewage Points To Severity Of Current COVID-19 Surge. The Los Angeles Times (12/17, 3.37M) reports an analysis of virus levels in Silicon Valley sewage treatment plants "confirms that the latest wave of coronavirus infections is sharply worse than the ones in the spring and summer." Data show that "the levels of virus in recent weeks is far greater than seen in either of the prior two waves of the pandemic."

California Hospital Systems Strain Under COVID-19 Surge.

The Los Angeles Times (12/17, 3.37M) reports Southern California ICU bed capacity "hit 0% Thursday, and officials warned that conditions in hospitals are expected to erode further if the coronavirus continues to spread unchecked." Hospitals are engaging in emergency protocols "to ensure the sickest patients still get the highest levels of care possible during the crisis," but "eventually, there may be too many critically ill patients for the limited numbers of ICU doctors and nurses available, leading to greater chances of patients not getting the specialized care they need. And that can lead to increases in mortality."

The AP (12/17, Richer, Antczak) reports California hospitals "have all but run out of intensive care beds for COVID-19 patients, ambulances are backing up outside emergency rooms, and tents for triaging the sick are going up." While hospitals across the country are facing COVD-19-related

challenges, "the crisis is deepening with alarming speed in California. ... Intensive care unit capacity is at less than 1% in many California counties, and morgue space is also running out, in what is increasingly resembling the disaster last spring in New York City." The New York Times (12/17, Wolfe, Smith, 20.6M) also reports.

Complaint: Hundreds Of Long Beach Police Gathered Maskless In Close Proximity At November Event.

The Washington Post (12/17, Peiser, 10.52M) reports, "Nearly 300 Long Beach, Calif., police officers, uniformed and masked, gathered close together for a group picture on Nov. 5." However, "an informal image from that same day captured a different story – the officers are seen standing side-by-side and barefaced, the Long Beach Post first reported earlier this month." The department is now combatting "dozens of infections in its ranks," and "two Long Beach community groups are demanding an investigation and accusing the police chief of 'knowingly and willfully ordering a super spreader event.'"

Arizona Reports Nearly 6,000 New Cases Thursday.

The Arizona Republic (12/17, 1.05M) reports Arizona health officials "reported more than 5,800 new COVID-19 cases and 147 new known deaths on Thursday as hospitalizations for the disease" reached record levels. "The number of patients hospitalized statewide for known or suspected COVID-19 cases was at 3,884 on Wednesday a record high, up by 75 patients from the previous record of 3,809 set on Tuesday." The state's "average rate of new cases in the past week ranks among the highest in the nation, behind only Oklahoma, Tennessee and Rhode Island, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's COVID Data Tracker."

Analysis: COVID-19 Hitting US In Series Of Waves.

The Atlantic (12/17, Moser, 3.53M) reports that when the first COVID-19 surge began to abate in the spring, "public-health experts were already warning of a second surge." Through this paradigm, "the United States is in its third surge. Cases, hospitalizations, and deaths all peaked and then subsided first in April and again in August. When the current surge will peak is not yet clear."

COVID-19 Latest In Series Of Health Crises Faced By Marshall Islanders.

Politico (12/17, Diamond, 6.73M) reports on the outsized impact the COVID-19 crisis is having on Marshall Islanders living in the US, part of a diaspora of "thousands who fled the atolls in the Pacific after U.S. nuclear testing riddled the islands with radiation and rendered their communities unsafe. The islanders' experience during the pandemic has been a tragedy inside a tragedy, the culmination of decades-old U.S. policies and public health failures that continue to chase the Marshallese." In fact, an "outbreak in a Marshallese community in Arkansas was so bad, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this summer dispatched a team to specifically study it."

Rural Hospital Systems In Nevada Facing Strain From COVID-19 Cases.

The AP (12/17, Metz) reports Nevada "has more coronavirus hospitalizations per capita than any other state," describing "the overflow unit that one Reno hospital has set up in its parking garage to treat patients. But far from the state's population centers, rural hospitals...are also filling with patients." Rural hospitals have had to "convert sleep-study rooms into intensive care units and, at times, make wrenching decisions as capacity runs low and patient transfers turn increasingly difficult."

Utah Reports Record High 30 Daily COVID-19 Deaths Thursday.

The AP (12/17) reports health officials in Utah "reported 30 new deaths from the coronavirus Thursday, a new single day high that follows a monthlong surge in cases." This figure "eclipsed the previous high of 21 deaths reported Nov. 24, state figures show. A total of 1,126 people have died from COVID-19 since the pandemic began."

Nurses Say Rising COVID-19 Hospitalizations In New York Straining Staff.

The New York Times (12/17, Closson, 20.6M) reports on COVID-19 outbreaks among hospital staff and "nurses and other health care workers in the state have begun to warn about the conditions in hospitals, as virus patients are checking in at an alarming rate." On Wednesday, the Times adds, "more than 6,000 people were hospitalized and being treated for the virus." In the earlier outbreaks, "roughly 30,000 out-of-state nurses" helped, but in the current situation, Gov. Andrew "Cuomo and various hospital officials in New York have said they do not expect to be able to rely on them again." Meanwhile, "many nurses...say that their patient loads have now risen higher than in the spring."

COVID-19 Claims Lives Of Eight Wisconsin Nuns At Retirement Home.

The AP (12/17, Forliti, Gash, Crawford) reports over the past week, eight nuns living in a Milwaukee-area retirement home "died of COVID-19 complications in the last week – including four who passed away on the same day – a grim reminder of how quickly the virus can spread in congregate living situations, even when precautions are taken." The facility "had been free of the virus for the last nine months, but the congregation that runs the home found out on Thanksgiving Day that one of the roughly 100 sisters who live there had tested positive." Also reporting are The Hill (12/17, Budryk, 5.69M) and the New York Post (12/17, Lapin, 7.45M).

Illinois Post-Thanksgiving Surge Less Severe Than Rest Of Nation.

The AP (12/17, O'Connor) reports Illinois has avoided the worst of the "COVID-19 'surge upon a surge' that has struck some parts of the country in the aftermath of heavy travel and family congregations during the Thanksgiving holiday." Nevertheless, "Gov. J.B. Pritzker's administration on Thursday reported 181 additional deaths related to coronavirus illness and 8,828 newly confirmed infections." The article notes that after a surge in travel over Thanksgiving, "predictions

of the surge upon a surge peppered warnings from Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert."

Louisiana Reports Significant Spike In COVID-19 Hospitalizations.

The AP (12/17, Deslatte) reports Louisiana COVID-19 hospitalizations have "reached heights exceeding the state's summer surge of the coronavirus disease, a sobering statistic that mutes some of the excitement surrounding this week's first virus vaccinations." State officials "reported 1,602 patients hospitalized across the state with the COVID-19 disease caused by the coronavirus as the state grapples with its third surge in cases since the pandemic began. More than 6,600 people in the state have died from COVID-19 since March, according to state data."

Nevada Health Officials Warn Improving COVID-19 Trends May Be Temporary.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal (12/17, 372K) reports the Nevada Health and Human Services Department "reported improvement Thursday in most of the major COVID-19 metrics it tracks, but state officials warned that the slowdown observed in recent days may be temporary." The state reported 2,281 new coronavirus cases, marking "the smallest gain in a week." However, "Caleb Cage, who directs the state's response to the pandemic, and Kyra Morgan, the chief state biostatistician, acknowledged that the positivity rate's decline was the longest since September, but said it's too soon to label it a trend."

DC Mayor Eases Christmas COVID-19 Restrictions Amid Lawsuit.

The Washington Post (12/17, Boorstein, 10.52M) reports Washington, DC, Mayor Muriel Bowser "issued a late-night order Wednesday modifying the city's rules on worship services and other activities" during the COVID-19 crisis. The Archdiocese of Washington has filed a lawsuit challenging the "rules prohibiting large gatherings – including Christmas services – during the coronavirus pandemic."

Florida Governor Faces Sharp Criticism Over COVID-19 Decisions.

CNN (12/17, 89.21M) reports, "Warning signs about a Covid-19 spike have been flashing red in Florida this fall," but "Floridians who rely on Gov. Ron DeSantis and his administration might hardly know the pandemic is still a serious danger." The state's health department hasn't issued significant public communications on the crisis, and Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) "has consistently downplayed the severity of the pandemic," blocking "local governments from enforcing their own measures to protect residents from coronavirus, and sidelined health experts even as he promoted questionable science, according to CNN interviews with more than a dozen Florida officials and experts."

Georgia Governor Says State Will Continue Paying For Extra Nursing Staff.

The AP (12/17) reports Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp (R) said Thursday that "Georgia will keep paying for extra nurses to assist hospitals, nursing homes and other health care facilities that have struggled to find staff and keep up with demand because of the coronavirus pandemic. The

Republican governor" spoke "during a news conference at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta where Public Health Commissioner Kathleen Toomey and an intensive care unit nurse received a coronavirus vaccine in an attempt to demonstrate that it's safe and effective."

Report Details Lingering COVID-19 Risks To New York Nursing Homes.

The New York Post (12/17, Hogan, Lapin, 7.45M) reports according to a new report from the Empire Center for Public Policy, "New York's coronavirus-ravaged nursing homes are still 'acutely vulnerable'" to COVID-19. "Between Oct. 25 and Nov. 29, nursing home residents accounted for a quarter of all COVID-19 deaths statewide, despite making up less than half of 1 percent of the population, the Empire Center for Public Policy found."

As Vaccine Rollout Begins, California's Orange County Likely To Stay Locked Down For Another Month.

The Orange County (CA) Register (12/17, 594K) reports that as COVID-19 vaccine doses begin to be administered, "the virus's unchecked spread and nearly full hospitals mean restrictions and closures aren't likely to go away soon. Southern California is under a three-week stay home order, and 'we're in week two, but I'm not foreseeing that we'll be able to get out of the lockdown for (another) month at least,' Orange County Health Officer Dr. Clayton Chau said Thursday, Dec. 17."

Michigan House Votes To Limit Duration Of State Health Department's Emergency Powers.

The Detroit News (12/17, 1.16M) reports, "The Michigan House voted Thursday night to limit the emergency powers of the Department of Health and Human Services to 28 days, with any extensions requiring the approval of lawmakers." However, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer is likely to veto the measure. Whitmer's "own emergency powers were overturned by a Michigan Supreme Court ruling in October. After the ruling, Robert Gordon, the Department of Health and Human Services director, issued similar orders, from mask mandates to indoor dining closures, as epidemic orders under the public health code."

San Bernardino County Sues California Governor Over COVID-19 Restrictions.

The Los Angeles Times (12/17, 3.37M) reports San Bernardino County officials have "asked the California Supreme Court to overturn Gov. Gavin Newsom's stay-at-home order, alleging overreach under the state's emergency act." The county "said in a statement that Newsom has improperly acted as both the executive and legislative branch under the California Emergency Services Act since the pandemic hit nine months ago."

NIH's Collins Touts Scientific Collaboration That Led To Pfizer, Moderna COVID-19 Vaccines.

In an interview on CNN's Situation Room (12/17, 554K), NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins discusses the pending authorization of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine candidate, hailing the collaboration between NIH, pharmaceutical companies, and researchers "all working together, not

worrying too much about who got the credit...and doing in 11 months what normally takes about 10 years."

Article Examines Fauci's Qualifications For De Facto Pandemic Response Leader.

The Conversation (12/17, 162K) publishes an article describing NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci's CV and examining how his leadership and scholarship over the course of his career have prepared him to be the public face of the government's COVID-19 response.

EMA Moves Forward Date Of Meeting To Assess Moderna's COVID-19 Vaccine.

Reuters (12/17, Shabong) reports the European Medicines Agency (EMA) "on Thursday set up an exceptional meeting for Jan. 6 to assess a marketing authorisation application for Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine." The EMA "had earlier planned to meet on Jan. 12 to review the application." The EMA said, "Today, ahead of schedule, (Moderna) has submitted the last outstanding data package needed for the assessment of the application. This contains information that is specific to the manufacturing of the vaccine for the EU market."

The AP (12/17) reports EMA Executive Director Emer Cooke said, "We have constantly revised our planning to further streamline all the procedural aspects that need to be in place for a robust scientific assessment that leads to a marketing authorization in all EU countries. ... The number of infections is increasing across Europe and we are aware of the huge responsibility we have to get a vaccine to the market as quickly as is feasible, whilst maintaining the robustness of our scientific review."

Russian COVID-19 Vaccine Receives Mixed Response.

The AP (12/17, Litvinova) reports "the Russian-made version" of the COVID-19 vaccine "has received a mixed response, with reports of empty Moscow clinics that offered the shot to health care workers and teachers – the first members of the public designated to receive it." State-controlled media and Kremlin officials "touted the Sputnik V vaccine as a major achievement after it was approved Aug. 11." However, "among Russians, hope that the shot would reverse the course of the COVID-19 crisis has become mixed with wariness and skepticism, reflecting concerns about how it was rushed out while still in its late-stage testing to ensure its effectiveness and safety."

Putin Unsure About Taking COVID-19 Vaccine Due To Lack Of Testing In His Age Group.

The Hill (12/17, Choi, 5.69M) reports "Russian President Vladimir Putin, 68, said Thursday he is unsure about taking the coronavirus vaccine himself, citing the lack of testing done on those in his age group." He "made the remarks during a press conference, Bloomberg reports, as production of Russia's vaccine, Sputnik V, has been stalled due to lack of equipment." Putin said, "I'll do it as soon as it becomes possible."

Opinion: Legacies Of Tuskegee Syphilis Study, COVID-19 Remind Us To Listen To Patients Reluctant About Medical Treatment.

In an opinion piece for CNN (12/17, 89.21M), Tina Sacks, assistant professor at UC Berkeley's School of Social Welfare, writes that "many Black Americans have expressed reluctance to take the" COVID-19 "vaccine, a wariness some attribute to the enduring legacy of the egregious Tuskegee syphilis study." Sacks asserts that "the legacies of Tuskegee and Covid-19 are intertwined." For example, "both expose the depth of structural discrimination in the United States," and "remind us to listen and hear patients when they express distrust or reluctance about medical treatment." Sacks writes, "We must...ensure people are allowed to ask questions to make informed and uncoerced decisions about their health care."

Trusted Messengers Could Boost COVID-19 Vaccination Efforts Among Communities Hit Hard By COVID-19, Surveys Show.

Kaiser Health News (12/17, Eldred) reports public health officials "need to persuade people who are part of communities that have been hit hard by" COVID-19 "-- those in low-income families and some minority populations, especially Black and Latino residents – to take a vaccine developed in less than a year and approved under emergency use authorization." Older Americans "said they would like recommendations from doctors, health officials, or family and friends – people they trust, according to" a University of Michigan poll. Black people "are twice as likely to trust Black messengers versus white messengers," another survey showed.

Cognitive Impairment Could Complicate COVID-19 Vaccination Efforts In Long-Term Care Facilities.

Kaiser Health News (12/17, Graham) reports "long-term care residents' participation in the fastest and most extensive vaccination effort in U.S. history is clouded by a significant complication: More than half have cognitive impairment or dementia." This statistic "raises a number of questions," such as, "what if surrogates don't agree with the decision an elderly person has made and try to intervene?" With COVID-19 "outbreaks increasing, already-overwhelmed staffers may not have much time to sit down with residents to answer questions or have conversations with families over the phone" about the vaccine. CDC National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases Director Nancy Messonnier "acknowledged the agency was 'very concerned' that information about vaccines be adequately explained to long-term care residents." Something that must "be made clear to residents" is that "while vaccines have been tested on people age 65 and older, those tests did not include individuals living in long-term care, according to Dr. Sara Oliver, a CDC expert."

WHO Official Says COVID-19 Vaccine Not A "Silver Bullet" For Ending Pandemic.

Fox News (12/17, Farber, 23.99M) reports Takeshi Kasai, WHO's regional director for the Western Pacific, "this week warned that a COVID-19 vaccine is not necessarily a 'silver bullet' for ending the pandemic." Kasai said, "There is some light at the end of a long tunnel but these vaccines are not a silver bullet that will end the pandemic in the near future. ... This means that tired as we all are of this pandemic, we must stick to the actions and behaviors which protect not only ourselves but also those around us: hand washing, mask-wearing, physical distancing and avoiding places

that have a high risk of transmission." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci "said on Monday that he expects the country to see herd immunity by late spring or early summer after coronavirus vaccines become more widely available."

Finding Way To Vaccinate Black Americans For COVID-19 Reportedly Is A "Conundrum."

US News & World Report (12/17, Williams, 1.91M) reports that "finding a way to get a potentially game-changing [COVID-19] vaccine...into the arms of" Black Americans, who are "among those who need it most, is a conundrum that would vex King Solomon himself." Putting people "of color ahead of other groups for the vaccine is good public health practice, [Dr. Chris Beyrer, an epidemiologist and professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health,] says: They are canaries in the COVID-19 coal mine." Before "the vaccine rollout, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices acknowledged that mitigating racial inequities should be a factor in distributing the vaccine." CDC Director "Robert Redfield underscored the need in a statement accepting the committee's initial recommendation for priority groups, encouraging a future call to prioritize older people in multigenerational households."

GSK, Vir Aim To Succeed Where Eli Lilly "Failed" With Study On Antibody Candidate In Hospitalized Patients With COVID-19.

Endpoints News (12/17, Blankenship) reports that in October, "the NIH quickly cut" Eli Lilly's "antibody from a trial in moderately ill hospitalized patients" with COVID-19, and now, "GlaxoSmithKline and partner Vir Biotechnology are hoping to succeed where" Eli Lilly "failed." Vir and GSK "will now take a shot at" hospitalized patients with COVID-19 "as part of a placebo-controlled subtrial in the NIH's 'master protocol' Activ-3." Initially, NIH will "test GSK and Vir's candidate, dubbed VIR-7831, as well as an antibody combo from Brii Biosciences in an initial population of 450 moderately ill Covid-19 patients over the course of five days, the NIH said in a release."

UN Secretary-General Warns Against "Vaccinationalism" Amid Pandemic.

The Hill (12/17, Williams, 5.69M) reports "U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres warned against 'vaccinationalism' on Thursday as countries race to inoculate their populations against COVID-19." He "made the remark at a joint press conference with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, as he was discussing the World Health Organization's COVAX program, which aims to deliver coronavirus vaccines to developing countries." Guterres said, "It is not with vaccinationalism that we are going to defeat COVID-19. ... It is with international cooperation."

Some Healthcare Workers, First Responders Reluctant To Take COVID-19 Vaccine.

Bloomberg (12/17, Singh, Goldman, LaVito, 3.57M) reports "some nurses and emergency-response workers have expressed reluctance to take the new coronavirus vaccine, a reflection of unease that U.S. officials hope to overcome as they ramp up the nationwide immunization effort." Public health officials "say people's concerns have eased...but this week's launch of vaccinations made it clear that some health-care workers and first responders remain unwilling to get the

shot." Although "there are always vaccine detractors, hesitance among members of the medical community could deter the general public from getting it despite the safety record and more than 90% efficacy rate of the initial vaccines."

Commentary Urges Americans To Get Vaccinated Following FDA Panel's Recommendation To Grant EUA For Moderna's Vaccine.

In an opinion piece for Fox News (12/17, 23.99M), Sally Pipes, President, CEO, and Thomas W. Smith Fellow in Health Care Policy at the Pacific Research Institute, writes that "the vote Thursday by a U.S. Food and Drug Administration advisory panel to recommend an emergency use authorization for Moderna's coronavirus vaccine is an important and welcome step in our battle to end the COVID-19 pandemic." Pipes says it is "an indisputable scientific fact that vaccines are among the most effective – and safe – treatments ever devised by medical science. Widespread dissemination of COVID-19 vaccines is the fastest route to the pre-pandemic normal we all desire." Pipes concludes, "Americans need to set aside any misgivings they might have and get vaccinated."

Panel Of Vaccination Experts To Discuss Who Should Receive COVID-19 Vaccine After Nursing Home Residents, Healthcare Workers.

The AP (12/18, Stobbe) reports "a federal panel of vaccination experts takes up" the question of who will get vaccinated for COVID-19 after nursing home residents and healthcare workers "at an emergency meeting this weekend. No matter what the committee decides, there will be differences from state to state." According to the AP, "the panelists are leaning toward putting 'essential workers' first because bus drivers, grocery store clerks and similar employees can't work from home." However, "other experts say people age 65 and older should be next, along with people with certain medical conditions." CDC Director Robert Redfield "has said he believes priority should be given to people age 70 and older who live with children or grandchildren."

Oxford's COVID-19 Vaccine Has Strong Immune Response Under Two Full-Dose Regime, Early Trials Find.

Reuters (12/17, Smout, Weir) reports "Oxford University's COVID-19 vaccine candidate has a better immune response when a two full-dose regime is used rather than a full-dose followed by a half-dose booster, the university said on Thursday, citing data from early trials." The vaccine developers "have already published later stage trial results showing higher efficacy when a half dose is followed by a full dose, compared to a two full-dose regime." The new "details from the Phase I and 2 clinical trials released on Thursday made no reference to the half-dose/full-dose regime, which Oxford has said had been 'unplanned' but approved by regulators."

J&J Has Fully Enrolled Participants For First Late-Stage Trial Of COVID-19 Vaccine.

Reuters (12/17, Francis) reports "Johnson & Johnson said on Thursday it has fully enrolled participants for the first late-stage trial of its COVID-19 single-dose vaccine candidate." The study

"has enrolled about 45,000 participants and is being conducted by its unit Janssen, J&J said...in a statement, adding that it expects interim data from the trial by the end of January 2021."

BioNTech Chief Medical Officer Said Company's Choice To Move To Battling COVID-19 Happened Over Breakfast.

The AP (12/17, Jordans) reports "the doctor who led development of the first COVID-19 vaccine authorized in the United States, Britain and elsewhere said her company's decision to shift from cancer research to battling the coronavirus happened over breakfast as the possibility of a pandemic was starting to seem likely." BioNTech Chief Medical Officer Ozlem Tureci said, "I can remember the precise day, Jan. 24, when we made the decision at the breakfast table." During "a video call with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other officials, Tureci recounted how her husband and business partner, Ugur Sahin, predicted that the outbreak...in the Chinese city of Wuhan had all the ingredients for a global pandemic." She said, "He alerted all of us and made us...pivot from cancer therapy to this program and divert our resources to developing a vaccine."

COVID-19 Vaccinations Arrive At Long-Term Care Facilities In Some States.

The New York Times (12/17, Robles, MacFarquhar, Jordan, 20.6M) reports "an early round of [COVID-19] vaccinations is getting underway this week" in long-term care facilities "in a handful of states." The first COVID-19 "vaccinations are starting just as conditions in long-term care facilities have deteriorated anew, with nearly 20,000 cases and an estimated 5,000 deaths per week, according to the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living." During interviews, "nursing home administrators said they were unsure whether the number of residents who agree to be inoculated would mirror the number in the general population, or whether firsthand experience of the tragic losses would make both residents and staff members more inclined to take the vaccine."

Opinion: COVID-19 Vaccines Being Written As Victory For Big Pharma.

In an opinion piece for the New York Times (12/17, Buranyi, 20.6M), Stephen Buranyi, a visiting lecturer at the European Business School, writes that "a strange thing has happened in our celebration of" the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines: the vaccines "are being written...as a victory for pharmaceutical companies." Buranyi says "the rule in press coverage seems to be that the biggest brand involved gets top credit. ... There are stories about the Pfizer vaccine...the Moderna vaccine (a partnership between the National Institutes of Health and Moderna); and the AstraZeneca vaccine." Buranyi says "it's an incredible public relations coup for an industry desperate to rescue its image." Buranyi concludes, "The pharmaceutical industry wouldn't be able to rake in its profits and restore its reputation without funding that comes from our tax dollars. We shouldn't let Big Pharma forget it."

Scammers Attempting To Exploit COVID-19 Vaccine To Get People's Social Security Numbers, Officials Say.

The Hill (12/17, Deese, 5.69M) reports "scammers are attempting to exploit the news of the coronavirus vaccine by offering fake vaccine access for individuals who give their Social Security number to callers, public health officials have cautioned." Authorities "are warning about scammers targeting unsuspecting individuals seeking a vaccine, NBC News reports." Nenette Day, assistant special agent in charge at HHS' Office of Inspector General, said, "If you're receiving unsolicited offers for a vaccine – not one, not two, but about 10 red flags should go up. ... There is no way that you under any circumstance should deal with anybody except a known and reputable medical provider or pharmacy."

Government, Drugmakers Working Together To Create Network Of Detection Systems, Monitoring Devices Amid Vaccine Rollout.

TIME (12/17, Hennigan, Park, 18.1M) reports "shipping COVID-19 vaccine is a daunting challenge, not only because of the logistics involved in distributing millions of small glass vials to each corner of the country, but also because the doses must be kept frozen at far below normal freezer temperatures for the entire trip." In order "to ensure safe delivery, the U.S. government, drug makers and delivery companies have had to work together to develop a network of monitoring devices and detection systems." Every box comes "with a GPS beacon, a temperature monitor and a barcode that's scanned upon receipt. If the doses deviate from their target destination in each of the 41,689 U.S. zip codes, or if the vials get too hot or cold, officials at the companies and the government are immediately alerted to the problem." IHS is mentioned by TIME.

Rite Aid Teaming Up With CDC To Administer COVID-19 Vaccines.

Fox Business (12/17, Garber, 3.06M) reports "Rite Aid Corp. is partnering with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in helping administer COVID-19 vaccines." Rite Aid CEO Heyward Donigan said, "We have administered over one million COVID-19 tests and will be partnering with the CDC to help administer COVID-19 vaccines in our communities."

Successful US COVID-19 Vaccination Program Depends On Public Health Structure, Adequate Funding, Expert Says.

NPR (12/17, Gross, 3.69M) reports, "The fight against COVID-19 entered a new phase this week as American health care workers started getting vaccinated – the first in what will be a massive effort." Science writer Ed Yong of The Atlantic "says that the U.S. vaccination program will depend upon a public health structure that has been severely overburdened and underfunded." He points out "that the amount of money Congress allocated for vaccine distribution was 'minuscule' compared with the sum devoted to creating the vaccine." Yong also said that "when Congress awarded billions of research [dollars] to the [National Institutes of Health] to study COVID, none of that went down to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development."

Some Americans Say They Plan To Wait To Get Coronavirus Vaccine; Experts Say That Is Not Necessary.

USA Today (12/17, Rodriguez, 12.7M) reports, "Beverly Askey doesn't want to get the COVID-19 vaccine right away," and many Americans "think like Askey." An ABC News/Ipsos poll "released Monday found more than eight in 10 Americans would receive the COVID-19 vaccine, but 44% said they would wait a bit before getting it." Experts "say that while it's understandable to be hesitant of a new vaccine, physicians...say patients don't need to wait."

COVID-19 Vaccines Reportedly Being Distributed Under "Unprecedented" Security Measures.

The Hill (12/17, Wilson, 5.69M) reports, "Hospitals and health care systems are taking unprecedented steps to safeguard" COVID-19 vaccines due to "concerns over security and the potential for black markets," as well as a requirement by Operation Warp Speed "to develop a security plan." There are "extra security personnel and constantly running cameras" in and around the "storage units, where the locks have been upgraded." Amid all this, "the United States is still grappling with ways to keep track of everyone who receives a vaccine."

Professors Call FDA's Staffing Of Review Of Pfizer/BioNTech Vaccine Inadequate.

In a piece for STAT (12/17, 262K), Peter Doshi, associate professor of pharmaceutical health services research at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy, and Matthew Herder, associate professor of pharmacology in the faculty of medicine at Dalhousie University, write, "In what is arguably the most important decision the" FDA "has made this year – its emergency use authorization of the Pfizer/BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine – the agency apparently assigned only a single reviewer in each of two key scientific disciplines...to do the work in three weeks that usually takes months to do." The authors find fault with this staffing decision, pointing out that "without additional reviewers it is hard to comprehend how the work of several months could be squeezed into a matter of 22 days (including Saturdays and Sundays)." In their view, "by assigning only one clinical, one statistical, and one toxicology scientist to review the...vaccine, it seems that discussion, let alone disagreement, was curtailed by design."

US Made Deal To Keep Temperature Monitoring System Active In Ultra-Cold Coolers For Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine.

STAT (12/17, Goldhill, 262K) reports a "snafu...threatened to disrupt the smooth rollout" of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, over "how to monitor the temperature of the ultra-cold storage containers being used to distribute vials." Pfizer, according to sources unnamed, "planned to disconnect temperature-monitoring sensors on the containers once they were delivered to health care providers." Under a "$25 million deal...with Controlant Global, an Icelandic company that created the proprietary temperature-monitoring platform for all Pfizer's shipping containers," Pfizer will turn off the monitoring system when the coolers are delivered "and the federal government will simultaneously turn the system back on." HHS spokeswoman Natalie Baldassarre said, "Pfizer will de-activate the temperature monitor on their shipping container once they are delivered. Operation Warp Speed contracted with the manufacturer of the device to immediately re-activate it with no loss of temperature monitoring and no loss of data."

Confusion Reigns Over Issue Of Consent In Nursing Home Vaccinations.

The New York Times (12/17, 20.6M) reports, "There remains widespread confusion about a key element of the plan to protect some of the most vulnerable Americans against the coronavirus, report Rebecca Robbins and Jessica Silver-Greenberg for The New York Times: how nursing homes will get consent to vaccinate residents who aren't able to make their own medical decisions." Some states "are starting vaccinations in their nursing homes this week, but a broader nationwide effort will start in earnest on Monday as CVS and Walgreens employees begin to arrive at tens of thousands of nursing homes and assisted-living facilities to vaccinate staff and residents." A CVS executive "said such residents' legal representatives will be able to provide consent to nursing homes electronically or over the phone, but officials at multiple large nursing home chains said they were not aware of that."

Pfizer To Seek Approval Of COVID-19 Vaccine In Japan.

Reuters (12/17, Lies, Nadeem) reports that drugmaker Pfizer "will request for an approval of its COVID-19 vaccine in Japan on Friday, Kyodo News reported, citing sources familiar with the move." The Japanese government "has a supply deal with Pfizer for 120 million vaccine doses." The US and Britain "have already begun administering the vaccine made by Pfizer and German partner BioNTech."

EU Plans To Begin Administering COVID-19 Vaccines As Early As December 27.

The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Hinshaw, Kalin, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports the EU plans to begin administering COVID-19 vaccines as early as December 27, just days after its expected decision on authorization of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

New Zealand Offers Neighboring Nations Free COVID-19 Vaccines.

The Hill (12/17, Deese, 5.69M) reports New Zealand "announced Thursday that it would provide free COVID-19 vaccines to its population of 5 million, plus additional free vaccines to neighboring nations." The announcement "came as government officials also said the country had purchased vaccines from two major developers, AstraZeneca and Novavax, NPR reported." New Zealand "said it would support sending free vaccines to Tokelau, Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu if they request them."

Germany Faces Worsening Coronavirus Situation Each Week.

The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that in Germany daily coronavirus infections and deaths are exceeding records every week which is increasing pressure on the country's health system and forcing government leaders to impose a harder lockdown.

Sweden's King Criticizes Country's Approach To COVID-19.

Bloomberg (12/17, Daly, Lindeberg, Rolander, 3.57M) reports that Sweden's monarch King Carl XVI Gustaf said the country's COVID-19 approach has failed, laying the blame on "the chief

architect of Sweden's strategy, Anders Tegnell, its state epidemiologist." Similarly, "Prime Minister Stefan Lofven also voiced his displeasure." He said, "The King observes, as we and many others have, that the fact that so many people have died cannot be seen as anything else than a failure." Still, "Tegnell has continued to defend Sweden's overall strategy of avoiding lockdowns." Tegnell "also argues that there's no real evidence that face masks work, and Swedes are among the only people left going about their daily lives largely mask-free, with shops, restaurants and gyms all still open."

Also reporting are the AP (12/17, Olsen), The Hill (12/17, 5.69M), and Newsweek (12/17, 2.67M).

Netherlands To Start Administering Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine Next Month After Likely EU Approval.

The AP (12/17) reports, "The Dutch health minister said Thursday that coronavirus vaccinations using the Pfizer-BioNTech shots will start Jan. 8 if the European Union's medicines agency approves it for use next week."

Eastern Europe Faces Threat Of Air Pollution In Addition To COVID-19 Challenges.

The AP (12/17, Emric) reports, "With the arrival of cold and foggy winter weather amid the pandemic, eastern Europe is facing an extra respiratory health hazard – air pollution." The UN "has warned in previous years that people in all major cities across the Western Balkans face alarming levels of air pollution that are reducing their life expectancies," but "this year, the problem is coupled with the soaring COVID-19 infections."

Experts Recommend Elderly, Nursing Home Staff And Residents, Medics Should Be First To Receive COVID-19 Vaccine In Germany.

The AP (12/17, Jordans) reports, "An independent expert team on Thursday recommended that people over age 80, residents and staff in nursing homes, and medics at high risk of exposing themselves or others to COVID-19 should be the first in Germany to get the coronavirus vaccine." This "recommendation, which is likely to form the basis of an official decree Friday, comes as Germany grapples with a growing number of new cases and deaths from the coronavirus."

Large Swaths Of Southern England To Be Placed Under UK's Strictest Lockdown Measures.

The AP (12/17, Hui) reports, "Large parts of southern England will be placed under the country's strictest coronavirus restrictions from this weekend, Britain's health secretary said Thursday, as infections and hospital admissions continue to surge in those areas."

Reuters (12/17, James, Piper) also reports.

Macron In Quarantine After Testing Positive For COVID-19.

Reuters (12/17, Pineau) reports that French President Emmanuel Macron "tested positive for the coronavirus on Thursday, prompting a track-and-trace effort across Europe following numerous meetings between the French leader and EU heads of government in recent days." According to

Reuters, "An Elysee official described Macron as tired and having a cough, and said that it was not excluded that he be moved to a presidential retreat close to the Palace of Versailles to rest." Reuters says Macron "will cancel all upcoming trips including a Dec. 22 visit to Lebanon where he has led international efforts to resolve a deep-rooted political crisis."

The AP (12/17) reports that "the French and Spanish prime ministers and the EU Council president were among many top officials self-isolating because they had recent contact with" Macron. The AP adds that Macron's wife, Brigitte, 67, "tested negative on Thursday. She has no symptoms and will self-isolate as a precaution, her office said." The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Bisserbe, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), the Washington Post (12/17, Birnbaum, 10.52M), and Politico Europe (12/17, 15K) provide details on Macron's diagnosis.

Mexico's Government Floats Idea Of Purchasing Fewer COVID-19 Vaccine Doses From CanSino Biologics Than Previously Announced.

Reuters (12/17, Cortes Fernandez, Barrera, Garrison) reports that "the Mexican government on Thursday floated the possibility that it will purchase far fewer COVID-19 vaccine doses from CanSino Biologics Inc than the 35 million doses announced last week by the country's foreign minister." Mexico's "Deputy Health Minister Hugo Lopez-Gatell, the government's most prominent pandemic-response official, told W Radio that the amount of vaccines Mexico aims to buy from Chinese drugmaker CanSino is between 10 million and 35 million doses." He "also noted that the government is close to signing a separate vaccine contract with Johnson & Johnson's Janssen unit for a potential 22 million doses."

Pfizer Facing Difficulty With Brazil Drug Regulator's COVID-19 Vaccine Requirements.

Reuters (12/17, Fonseca) reports, "Pfizer is encountering difficulty in registering its COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use in Brazil due to the level of detail required by the regulator, Health Minister Eduardo Pazuello said on Thursday." Pazuello's "comments could raise tensions with Pfizer, whose vaccine is already being used in Britain and the United States." The comments "will also fuel concerns from critics who argue that Brazil's vaccine rollout is progressing too slowly, just as the virus roars back to life."

Australian States, Territories Impose Border Restrictions As Sydney COVID-19 Cluster Increases.

Reuters (12/17, Packham, Jose) reports, "Australian states and territories on Friday begun imposing border restrictions after 28 COVID-19 cases were detected from a cluster on Sydney's northern beaches, with fears the number of infections will rise."

Second Coronavirus Wave Hits West, Central Africa As Weather Cools Down.

Reuters (12/17, Lorgerie, McAllister) reports, "A second wave of coronavirus infections is hitting West and Central Africa, and experts are warning it could be worse than the first as cooler weather descends on a region where most countries cannot afford a vaccine."

Cargill Closing Ontario Beef Processing Plant Due To COVID-19 Outbreak Among Workers.

Reuters (12/17, Nickel) reports, "Cargill Inc will begin to temporarily close its Guelph, Ontario beef processing plant on Thursday because of an outbreak of COVID-19 infections among workers, the company and a public health organization said."

All Brazilians Must Get COVID-19 Vaccine Or Else Lose Access To Public Spaces, Top Court Rules.

Bloomberg (12/17, Preissler Iglesias, 3.57M) reports, "All Brazilians are required to be vaccinated against Covid-19 under the penalty of being banned from certain public activities and spaces, the country's top court has decided." Altogether, 10 "justices of the 11-member court backed the mandatory inoculation with only one vote against in a virtual session held Thursday." The decision "is a blow to President Jair Bolsonaro, who has said he won't get a vaccine and nobody should be forced to."

Africa Not Likely To See COVID-19 Vaccine Campaigns Until April, Officials Warn.

The Washington Post (12/16, Paquette, Bearak, 10.52M) reports that COVID-19 vaccine "distribution campaigns across Africa are not likely to begin until April, the head of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated." Even at that time, "far fewer doses will be sent to African countries than are being shipped to the United States and Europe." It seems that "most of Africa's 54 nations stand to benefit from the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Assess Facility, or COVAX, the World Health Organization-backed program set to divide a billion doses across 92 low- and middle-income countries next year." However, "$5 billion more is needed to cover vulnerable residents in target nations by the end of 2021, according to Gavi, the alliance raising funds for Covax."

Reuters (12/17, Mohammed) also reports.

SEC Sues Decision Diagnostics Corp For Allegedly Misleading Investors On COVID-19 Tests.

Reuters (12/17) reports that the SEC "sued Decision Diagnostics Corp and its chief executive for allegedly misleading investors by promising the biotechnology company could test for COVID-19 with a finger-prick of blood and provide accurate results in less than one minute."

After Report On Trump Administration Influence On CDC Messaging, Question Of Commission Arises.

NBC News (12/17, Todd, Murray, Dann, Holzberg, 4.91M) reports, "Our question this morning: Is Congress going to create a 9/11-like commission to study what went wrong with the United States' handling of the coronavirus – after more than 300,000 and counting deaths, an erosion in trust in our government and allegations of political interference and manipulation?" The "latest development here: A pair of CDC political appointees told the New York Times about how the Trump administration exerted ever-increasing influence over the agency's message and data."

That "comes after a whistleblower alleged that CDC director Robert Redfield directed staff to delete an email from a Trump political appointee that sought changes to scientific reports, as well as after the CDC and FDA bungled the United States' initial coronavirus testing plan."

The Hill (12/17, Budryk, 5.69M) reports that House Majority Whip James Clyburn (D-SC) "said Thursday that the federal response to the coronavirus pandemic may require a commission similar to the one that investigated the leadup to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks." Clyburn "discussed the idea with MSNBC's Chuck Todd, following the disclosure of emails in which [the] White House pushed a strategy of 'herd immunity' in response to the virus."

The Hilton Head Island (SC) Packet (12/17, Monk, 105K) also reports.

Vice President Expected To Receive Coronavirus Vaccine On Camera Friday Morning.

The New York Times (12/17, Karni, 20.6M) reports, "At 8 a.m. on Friday, Vice President Mike Pence will roll up his sleeve to receive the coronavirus vaccine, a televised symbol of reassurance for vaccine skeptics worried about its dangers." Joe Biden "is scheduled to receive his injection on camera next week." However, "notably absent from any planned public proceedings is President Trump, who has said relatively little about the vaccine that may be seen as a singular achievement and has made it clear that he is not scheduled to take it himself."

The Daily Caller (12/17, Datoc, 375K) also reports.

Fauci Says He Is Looking Forward To Ordering A Beer And Burger At A Restaurant When Pandemic Ends.

Fox News (12/17, Puhak, 23.99M) reports, "America's top infectious disease expert said he's most looking forward to ordering a beer and burger from a restaurant when the coronavirus pandemic comes to a close." Dr. Anthony Fauci "made the comments during a recent radio interview with L.A.-area DJ Maggie McKay of 94.7 The Wave, explaining that he and his wife Christine Grady haven't had a traditional sit-down meal at a restaurant since February." Instead, the director of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases "said he and his spouse have turned to takeout in a pinch."

Fauci Says He Is Not Advocating Canceling Christmas, Just Exercising Caution.

Fox News (12/17, Creitz, 23.99M) reports that White House coronavirus task force member Dr. Anthony Fauci "responded Thursday to critics who have claimed he wants to 'cancel Christmas' on account of the coronavirus pandemic." Fauci "told 'Bill Hemmer Reports' Thursday that he has never recommended that Americans completely scrap holiday gatherings, but rather exercise caution when it comes to who they get together with." Fauci said, "I'm not saying that everyone should cancel the family gathering, I'm saying that people will need to make individual choices."

The New York Post (12/17, O'Neill, 7.45M) reports "Fauci said he's simply urging people to take caution when it comes to traveling, and to limit the size of holiday get-togethers." Fauci said, "You don't have to cancel things – you can still spend time with your family. I'm just asking people to be careful when it comes to travel that may not be necessary, travel that you can avoid, and when you get together, try to make some limitation to it."

The Washington Times (12/17, Ernst, 626K) also reports.

Congress To Begin Receiving Coronavirus Vaccinations In Coming Days.

Politico (12/17, Zanona, Levine, Ferris, 6.73M) reports that Congress "will receive a limited batch of the coronavirus vaccine in the coming days, according to multiple sources, marking a major development for lawmakers and frontline workers in a Capitol complex that has battled dozens of cases this year." Vaccines for federal agencies and officials across Washington "have been arriving at Walter Reed Medical Center in recent days, and thousands of doses are expected to be designated for the House and Senate, though congressional leadership offices said they have no information to provide." And "in another sign that vaccinations are imminent on the Hill, the Capitol physician has begun privately informing some members and staff that he has requested vaccines and that his office is making some preparations, including setting up freezer storage."

The Washington Post (12/17, Kane, 10.52M) reports Brian P. Monahan, the attending physician of the U.S. Congress and the Supreme Court, "will soon receive doses of the coronavirus vaccine to administer to the Supreme Court justices and senior members of Congress under a continuity-of-government plan crafted by intelligence experts." Monahan said in a letter, "Congress and the Supreme Court, along with executive branch agencies, will be provided with a specific number of covid-19 doses to meet long-standing requirements for continuity of government operations."

The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Andrews, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports all federal lawmakers will have the ability to get Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine in the coming days. Surgeon General Jerome Adams is mentioned by the Journal.

The Hill (12/17, Budryk, 5.69M) reports that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) "said Thursday that he will receive the coronavirus vaccine in the days ahead."

The Washington Examiner (12/17, Ferrechio, 888K) reports House "Speaker Nancy Pelosi and...McConnell will get a COVID-19 vaccine, the two leaders announced in separate statements Thursday." McConnell said, "Because of government continuity requirements, I have been informed by the Office of the Attending Physician that I am eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine, which I will accept in the coming days." Pelosi "said she would also get the vaccine, citing government continuity."

CNN (12/17, Barrett, Kelly, 89.21M) and USA Today (12/17, Sonka, 12.7M) also report.

Iowa To Get Fewer Vaccine Doses Than Promised, Moves Ahead With Relaxing Restrictions.

The AP (12/17) reports, "It's unclear why Iowa will receive fewer doses of coronavirus vaccine than initially promised by the federal government, but the state is moving ahead with plans to relax restrictions beginning Thursday even while reporting nearly 100 additional deaths." The Iowa Department of Public Health "released a statement Wednesday evening saying the state's allocation would be reduced by up to 30%." The agency "didn't explain why the allocation would be smaller, and state officials didn't respond to a question Thursday about the matter."

Michigan To Receive Fewer Doses Of Pfizer Vaccine Next Week Than State Received This Week, State Officials Say.

The Detroit News (12/17, Bouffard, 1.16M) reports, "Michigan's allotment of Pfizer Inc.'s COVID-19 vaccine will be smaller next week than this week's initial shipments, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services." The state "was told by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that it would initially receive 84,875 doses of the vaccine manufactured in the Kalamazoo area." State officials "learned in a phone call late Wednesday that the state will get 60,000 doses next week, said Lynn Sutfin, a spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services."

The Detroit Free Press (12/17, Baldas, 2.16M) also reports.

Oregon To Get Fewer Doses Of Pfizer Vaccine Than Planned Next Week, State Health Officials Say.

The AP (12/17) reports that Oregon "will receive fewer doses of the COVID-19 vaccine than expected next week, state health officials said." KOIN "reports that officials expected to receive 40,950 doses of the Pfizer vaccine next week from the federal government, but will now only receive 25,350 doses." Federal officials "have told other states to expect fewer doses...in next week's shipments as well."

Washington Governor Says State To Receive 40% Fewer Vaccine Doses Than Expected Next Week.

The AP (12/17) reports that Gov. Jay Inslee (D) "says Washington's allocation of the COVID-19 vaccine will be cut by 40% next week – and other states are also seeing reductions." In a tweet Thursday, Inslee "said the Centers for Disease Control told Washington about the reduced shipments." Inslee wrote, "This is disruptive and frustrating. We need accurate, predictable numbers to plan and ensure on-the-ground success. No explanation was given."

Texas Governor Vows "No More Shutdowns" As Hospitalizations Continue To Rise In State.

The Austin (TX) American Statesman (12/17, Cobler, Subscription Publication, 261K) reports that Gov. Greg Abbott (R) "again vowed Thursday he will not order new business closures as coronavirus hospitalizations continue to rise statewide, instead touting improved treatments and the arrival of the coronavirus vaccine in Texas." He said, "The fact of the matter is that it's time to put behind us shutdowns. No more shutdowns. We need to focus on opening up businesses." The governor's news conference, "his first in a month, comes days after the first vaccines arrived at health care facilities in Austin, Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas."

The AP (12/17) reports Abbott said that "more than 1 million Texans are expected to be vaccinated for COVID-19 by the end of the month as part of the largest vaccination campaign in U.S. history." Texas "had received about 95,000 doses of Pfizer's vaccine through Wednesday with another 129,000 doses to be delivered Thursday, Abbott said."

KHOU-TV Houston (12/17, Alexander, 340K) also reports.

Tennessee Governor Touts Vaccine Distribution, But Says Residents Need To Remain Vigilant.

CNN (12/17, Burnside, 89.21M) reports, "As the state prepares to administer its first shipment of Covid-19 vaccines, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee is urging all residents to be vigilant and to continue acting responsibly during this pandemic." While the authorization of vaccines "is a turning point in this pandemic, the sobering reality is that Tennesseans are getting sicker, Lee told reporters Thursday." Decisions people "made over the Thanksgiving holiday [are] having a severe reality on the hospital system across the state, Lee said."

Juneau Extends Mask Requirement For At Least Six More Months.

The AP (12/17) reports, "A mask mandate in Juneau has been extended for at least six more months." The ordinance "passed by the City and Borough of Juneau Assembly on Monday upholds the requirement for masks to be worn in all indoor public settings and outdoors when within six feet (1.8 meters) of other people." Alaska "is one of 12 states as of Wednesday without a statewide mask mandate."

Opinion: States Need To Deliver Coronavirus Vaccine To At-Risk Elders Living At Home.

In an article for Forbes (12/17, 10.33M), contributor Howard Gleckman writes, "The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has put residents and staff of nursing homes and assisted living facilities near the top of the list for receiving a covid-19 vaccine. That is the right call. But public health officials should not forget about the millions of frail older adults living at home who are at risk of dying from covid-19. And as it stands today, they may have to wait months for the vaccine. That delay could result in many needless deaths." Gleckman writes, "It likely will be summer before vaccines are widely available, so the states will have to ration. But as they do, they should remember the millions of people who are at high risk of severe illness or death from the virus, but who are living at home."

Tennessee Only State To Set Aside Portion Of Coronavirus Vaccine Shipment As Reserve.

The AP (12/17, Kruesi) reports, "As states rush to inoculate health care workers on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic, only Tennessee has prioritized building its own emergency reserve of the coveted vaccine." An Associated Press "review of each state's COVID-19 vaccine distribution plans shows that Tennessee alone has specified it will hold back a small portion in 'case of spoilage of vaccine shipped to facilities.'" The state's "initial shipment of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine that arrived Monday was not distributed for inoculation, so health care workers had to wait until the second shipment arrived days later."

Oklahoma Governor Moves Teachers Higher On Priority List For Coronavirus Vaccine.

The AP (12/17) reports that school teachers in Oklahoma "have been moved to a higher priority on the list of those eligible to receive the coronavirus vaccine, Gov. Kevin Stitt said Thursday." Stitt said, "I've directed the state department of health to move K-12 teachers and support staff

who interact with students up to phase two of our vaccine distribution plan." Stitt "said the change helps accomplish his goal of returning all of the state's schools to in-person classes in January, following the Christmas holiday break."

Memphis Physician Warns Tennessee Is One Of Worst Regions For COVID-19 Transmission.

Newsweek (12/17, Smith, 2.67M) reports that the state of Tennessee "is one of the worst regions nationwide for COVID transmission, an infectious disease specialist in Memphis has warned." Dr. Steve Threlkeld, "who works at the Baptist Hospital in the city, has said cases of coronavirus will continue to rise if no changes are made, putting intense pressure on hospital services." Tennessee "ranked second for daily cases per 100,000 people over the past week, according to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Wednesday."

DC Healthcare Workers, First Responders Get Coronavirus Vaccine.

The Washington Times (12/17, Zantow, 626K) reports that District of Columbia officials "highlighted the city's coronavirus vaccination program Thursday by publicly inoculating front-line first responders and health care workers at Kaiser Permanente Capitol Hill Medical Center." Dr. LaQuandra Nesbitt, "director of the D.C. Department of Health, was the first to receive the shot, followed by six others including a nurse, two doctors and members of the Fire and EMS Department."

First Doses Of Coronavirus Vaccine Administered In Native American Communities.

The AP (12/17, Lee, Johnson) reports, "The first doses of the coronavirus vaccine are being administered in Native American communities from the desert highlands of New Mexico to a coastal fishing tribe outside Seattle as the federal government and states rush to protect one of the most vulnerable U.S. populations." The "two-pronged effort includes a massive logistical operation by the federal government's Indian Health Service focusing on vaccinating health care workers at sovereign Indigenous nation clinics across the country and urban clinics serving off-reservation Native Americans." The agency's "initial allotment of about 22,000 vaccine doses from Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech arrived Monday at distribution centers on vast portions of the Navajo Nation in Arizona and New Mexico and in urban places like Phoenix, where hundreds of health care workers who care for Native Americans got vaccinated on Thursday."

NPR (12/17, Oxner, 3.69M) reports "about 68,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses will initially be distributed among the population, the Indian Health Service said last week." NPR adds that "Kailee Fretland, an Indian Health Service hospital pharmacist at the Red Lake Nation in Minnesota, helped design the vaccine distribution plans in an effort to avoid" having the pandemic disproportionately affect American Indian populations.

Colorado Unveils Program Giving Restaurants, Other Businesses Way To Loosen Vaccine Restrictions.

The Denver Post (12/17, Nicholson, 660K) reports that Colorado public health officials this week "unveiled a new program to let participating counties offer restaurants and other businesses a path to expand their capacities beyond the limits set by their county's color level on the COVID-19 restriction dial." The "new 5 Star State Certification Program 'requires businesses certified through the program to implement safety measures beyond what is already required by public health orders and guidelines,' according to a Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment news release." Officials said, "Depending on the county's level and metrics, certified businesses may be eligible for less-restrictive capacity caps."

San Francisco To Mandate Quarantine For Anyone Arriving From Outside Bay Area.

Fox News (12/17, Farber, 23.99M) reports, "A surge in cases of the novel coronavirus prompted San Francisco officials on Thursday to mandate that anyone traveling to the city from outside the Bay Area...quarantine for a period of time." The 10-day quarantine "will apply to anyone 'traveling, moving, or returning to San Francisco from anywhere outside the Bay Area,' according to city officials."

The San Francisco Chronicle (12/17, Allday, 2.44M) and the Los Angeles Times (12/17, Dolan, 3.37M) also report.

Judge Rules New York City Mayor Must Hand Over Documents Related To Handling Of Pandemic.

The New York Post (12/17, Campanile, 7.45M) reports that New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio (D) "must comply with a probe into the city's response to the coronavirus pandemic, a judge ruled Thursday." Manhattan state Supreme Court Justice Lyle Frank "said Comptroller and 2021 mayoral candidate Scott Stringer has broad authority under the law to request documents and compel testimony from City Hall and agencies to analyze the city's handling of the pandemic." Stringer "filed the lawsuit after accusing City Hall of stonewalling over documents, including requests via subpoena, related to his investigation."

Maryland Governor Orders Those Traveling To, From State To Test Negative For COVID-19 Or Quarantine.

The Hill (12/17, 5.69M) reports that Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan (R) "is requiring residents who travel out of state to get tested for COVID-19 or quarantine." Hogan "announced an emergency order during a press conference Thursday, which limits travel for essential purposes." Those "who do travel to and from the state have to obtain a negative COVID-19 test result or self-quarantine for 10 days."

The AP (12/17, Witte) reports Hogan "urged state residents to stay home for the holidays to help stop the spread of COVID-19, and also announced a new $180 million relief package to help businesses and people affected by the pandemic."

The Washington Post (12/17, Schneider, Wiggins, Zauzmer, 10.52M), the Washington Times (12/17, Zantow, 626K), and the Baltimore Sun (12/17, Knezevich, 629K) also report.

Study: Pandemic Restrictions Cost 500,000 California Workers Their Jobs.

The Orange County (CA) Register (12/17, Lansner, 594K) reports, "A Chapman University study says California would have had roughly one-third fewer job losses this year if its pandemic restrictions had been more accommodating to the business community." The study "also says the state's strict business limitation saved 6,600 lives." Chapman's researchers "found the state mandates designed to curb the coronavirus cost 500,000 more workers their jobs."

Nevada Official Tells Panel State Expects To See New COVID-19 Surge Over Holidays.

The AP (12/17) reports, "With deaths and hospitalizations attributed to the spread of COVID-19 during Thanksgiving gatherings appearing to level off in Nevada, officials said Thursday they expect new surges in reported cases following the Christmas and New Year's holidays." Kyra Morgan, "chief state biostatistician, told the COVID-19 Mitigation and Management Task Force during a weekly update: 'It's a little bit too early to conclude that we're approaching any kind of a plateau. As Christmas approaches and New Year's approaches we do anticipate...significant impact on our cases.'"

Some Wyoming Bars Are Ignoring Statewide Mandate To Close Earlier.

The AP (12/17) reports that some bars in northwestern Wyoming "are defying a statewide public health order to close earlier than usual to discourage spread of the coronavirus." Public health orders "announced by Gov. Mark Gordon on Dec. 7 require bars and restaurants to close from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. through at least Jan. 8." The goal "is to discourage people from gathering in situations that make virus spread more likely while stopping short of closing bars and restaurants completely."

California Panel Discusses Putting First Responders, Teachers, Farmworkers Next In Line For Vaccine.

The Los Angeles Times (12/17, Money, Lin, 3.37M) reports that California's "first responders, farmworkers and educators would be among those next in line to be vaccinated against COVID-19 under recommendations that a state advisory committee discussed this week." Should that guidance "eventually be put into effect, those workers – as well as others in the broadly defined fields of education and childcare, emergency services, and food and agriculture – would be prioritized within the second major stage of the state's wider vaccination push." Though California's vaccine rollout "plans continue to be defined, Wednesday's meeting of the state Community Vaccine Advisory Committee provided a window into how the process may play out in the weeks to come."

Michigan Lawmakers Reinstate Moratorium On Water Shutoffs Through March.

The AP (12/17, Eggert) reports that Michigan lawmakers "voted Thursday to prohibit water shutoffs across the state through March, reinstating a moratorium that was upended by a court ruling." The bill, "which received final approval 96-9 in the House, will be signed by Gov. Gretchen

Whitmer." It "was among a number of pandemic-related measures approved by legislators as they worked to conclude their work before adjourning for the year."

MLive (MI) (12/17, Dodge, 828K) reports the Senate bill "would also require public water suppliers to strive to determine which households lack water service and make best efforts to restore it."

The Hill (12/17, Bowden, 5.69M) also reports.

Supreme Court Denies Christian School's Request To Be Exempt From School Closures Amid Pandemic.

The Washington Post (12/17, Barnes, 10.52M) reports that the Supreme Court on Thursday "denied a Kentucky Christian academy's plea that it should be exempt from the governor's order requiring all K-12 institutions to temporarily cease in-person classes because of rising coronavirus cases." Danville Christian Academy, "joined by Kentucky's attorney general, said it should not be compared to other schools, but to businesses that have been allowed to remain open with reduced capacities, and doing otherwise was a violation of religious rights." But the court, "in an unsigned order, noted that schools are about to begin their holiday breaks, and Gov. Andy Beshear's mandate expires before schools reopen Jan. 4."

The New York Times (12/17, Liptak, 20.6M) reports the court's brief "added that the challengers had not squarely confronted an important distinction. 'The order applies equally to secular schools and religious schools, but the applicants argue that the order treats schools (including religious schools) worse than restaurants, bars and gyms, for example, which remain open,' the opinion said." The opinion continued, "Under all of the circumstances, especially the timing and the impending expiration of the order...we deny the application without prejudice to the applicants or other parties seeking a new preliminary injunction if the governor issues a school-closing order that applies in the new year."

The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Bravin, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) and USA Today (12/17, Wolf, 12.7M) also report.

Survey Reveals Americans' Attitudes Toward COVID-19 Safety Precautions.

CNN (12/18, Kallingal, Fox, 89.21M) reports that according to a newly released KFF survey, "most Americans say they can keep up social distancing until the pandemic has eased or until there's a vaccine – and most think they'll need to." Such "fears may be justified. An ensemble forecast published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now projects there will be 357,000 to 391,000 coronavirus deaths in the US by January 9." The survey suggests these "fears may have motivated people to accept public health advice about wearing masks and staying away from other people." CNN notes that NIAID Director Anthony Fauci said in October that "wearing masks 'makes a difference' and that the politicization of masks should stop."

Article Examines Possibility Of Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccinations.

Bloomberg (12/18, Wilkens-Iafolla, 3.57M) reports concerns about low COVID-19 vaccine compliance rates have "provoked discussion of vaccine mandates by government authorities and

employers. Under the law, both have the power to issue such orders. Whether mandates are effective in expanding the uptake of a vaccine is a matter of debate, however." The article continues to answer a series of questions surrounding the issue. On the topic of whether vaccines could become mandatory for public school students, Bloomberg says this is not likely in the near future, noting that "the first Covid-19 vaccine authorized for distribution in the U.S. by the Food and Drug Administration, made by Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE, was only given a green light for people 16 years old and above."

US Reportedly Lacks Safeguards To Ensure COVID-19 Vaccine Doses Are Administered To Most At-Risk Patients, Critical Workers.

Politico (12/18, Ollstein, Roubein, 6.73M) reports the US "lacks safeguards to ensure the next wave of" COVID-19 vaccine doses reaches "the most critical workers and at-risk patients rather than star athletes or the well-connected." There is "little chance for anyone to jump the line right now while an extremely limited supply of the vaccine is being distributed only in hospitals and nursing homes." However, "as soon as more doses become available to wider categories of people, much of the immunization program will rely on the honor system, and states will leave it to pharmacies, community health centers and individual employers to verify if someone requesting a shot falls into a priority category." Politico adds that "when an FDA expert panel voted Thursday to recommend the agency back a second Covid vaccine from Moderna, one NIH scientist abstained from the vote."

Approval For Moderna's COVID-19 Shot Would Boost Vaccination Efforts.

The Wall Street Journal (12/18, Loftus, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that the approval of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine would add 20 million extra vaccine doses to the 25 million Pfizer is supplying. The Journal quotes CDC's Anita Patel saying Pfizer's larger order size "poses challenges especially in rural areas of the country where that volume of product is more difficult to manage."

Incarcerated Populations Hit Hard By COVID-19.

The New York Times (12/18, Lash, 20.6M) reports on the impact that COVID-19 is having on jail populations, citing "an analysis of more than 500 jails. Averaging all county jails where data was available, inmate populations fell to 75 percent of their pre-pandemic levels by mid-May," but then largely rose back to pre-pandemic levels. Moreover, "the number of deaths from the virus today far exceeds the early days of the pandemic, posing a greater threat to inmates and the public than ever before."

Covid And The Rebirth Of US Industrial Policy (Fauci Mention).

The Financial Times (12/18, Luce, Subscription Publication, 1.48M) reports, "Here are two words that could rapidly empty a Washington dinner party: industrial policy. Here are two that could get the guests back to the table..."

Columnist Muses On Lessons Learned From Lewis And Clark Expedition For Pandemic Winter.

In a column in the New York Times (12/18, 20.6M), Timothy Egan writes about lessons about the coming winter during the COVID-19 crisis that can be learned from the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1805-06. The coming winter "could be 'the most difficult time in the public health history of this nation' as Robert Redfield, the head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said earlier this month." The expedition "fared well once they emerged from their long winter. We, on the other hand, face a brutal early spring. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation projects that more than 500,000 Americans likely will have died from Covid-19 by the end of March. Dr. Anthony Fauci has made similar grim assessments of what lies ahead; in November he predicted December would see 'a surge superimposed upon' a surge, not unlike the waves of the Pacific, gray and unrelenting in the December dusk."

HHS in the News

CDC Estimates A Record 81,000 People Died From Drug Overdoses In 12-Month Period.

Axios (12/17, Fernandez, 1.26M) reports that an "estimated 81,000 people died from a drug overdose between June 2019 and May 2020, the highest number ever recorded in a 12-month period, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report released on Thursday." The provisional data suggest "the pandemic accelerated overdose deaths." CDC Director Robert Redfield said in a statement: "The disruption to daily life due to the COVID-19 pandemic has hit those with substance use disorder hard."

CNN International (12/18, Kallingal, Fox) reports the most common overdoses are those "from synthetic opioids such as illicitly manufactured fentanyl. But there's also an increase in deaths from drugs such as methamphetamine and cocaine, the CDC added." The federal agency said, "The 12-month count of synthetic opioid deaths increased 38.4% from the 12 months ending in June 2019 compared with the 12 months ending in May 2020."

The Hill (12/17, Kelley, 5.69M) and the Washington Examiner (12/17, Hogberg, 888K) also report.

CDC Says Underage Tobacco Use Is Down.

Bloomberg (12/17, Clough, Kary, 3.57M) says, "The number of middle- and high-school students who use tobacco products fell 28% in 2020 to about 4.5 million, according to a new report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention using survey data collected from Jan. 16 to March 16." The agency pointed out that these "declines were driven largely by lower use of e-cigarettes, cigars and smokeless tobacco products."

HealthDay (12/17, Mundell, 11K) reports, "The sharp decline in vaping rates was welcome news" and "suggests that recent moves by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to ban the most enticing, flavored varieties of e-cigarettes has had an effect." The article quotes CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield as saying, "The decline in tobacco product use over the past year is a win for public health. Yet, our work is far from done. Nearly 4.5 million U.S. youths still use tobacco

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products, putting a new generation at risk for nicotine addiction and other health risks." The piece also quotes FDA Commissioner Dr. Stephen Hahn as saying, "We remain very concerned about the overall tobacco use rates for young people, including the nearly 3.6 million youth who currently use e-cigarettes. FDA will continue to monitor the marketplace, expand our public education efforts, and use our regulatory authority to further ensure all tobacco products, and e-cigarettes in particular, are not marketed to, sold to, or used by kids."

The Winston-Salem (NC) Journal (12/17, Craver, 226K) also reports on the analysis, and quotes Dr. Nora Volkow, director of National Institute on Drug Abuse, as saying, "The rapid rise of teen nicotine vaping in recent years has been unprecedented and deeply concerning since we know that nicotine is highly addictive and can be delivered at high doses by vaping devices, which may also contain other toxic chemicals that may be harmful when inhaled."

Current Use Of Tobacco Product Reported By 16.2% Of US Middle, High School Students.

HealthDay (12/17, 11K) reports, "Current use of any tobacco product was reported by 16.2 percent of all U.S. middle and high school students in 2020, according to research published in the Dec. 18 issue of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report." Using data from the 2019 and 2020 National Youth Tobacco Surveys, "researchers found that current use of any tobacco product was reported by 16.2 percent (4.47 million) of all students in 2020, including 23.6 and 6.7 percent of high school and middle school students, respectively. The most commonly used tobacco product among high school and middle school students was electronic cigarettes (19.6 and 4.7 percent, respectively)." Meanwhile, "among high school and middle school students, there were decreases noted in current use of any tobacco product...from 2019 to 2020, resulting in about 1.73 million fewer youth tobacco product users."

CMS Unveils New Initiative Which Aims To Improve Care Coordination For Dual Eligibles.

FierceHealthcare (12/17, King, 150K) reports, "The Trump administration proposed a new initiative aimed at improving care coordination among Medicaid managed care plans for dual-eligible Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries." This model, which CMS unveiled on Thursday, "will allow Medicaid managed care organizations to participate in the global and professional options in the agency's Direct Contracting model, which offers voluntary risk-sharing agreements with providers." CMS Administrator Seema Verma is quoted as saying, "For too long we have struggled to deliver acceptable outcomes for this vulnerable population, but today's model is a game-changer. ... It represents a significant step toward addressing these longstanding issues and ensuring they receive the coordinated care they rightfully deserve."

Former FDA Chief Gottlieb Hails Rollback Of Frozen Cherry Pie Regulations.

The Hill (12/17, Budryk, 5.69M) reports, "Former Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Scott Gottlieb hailed the FDA's proposed rolling back of federal regulations on frozen cherry pie." The Hill quotes Gottlieb saying in a tweet, "Thanks to the hard work of my FDA team in 2018, the Federal government will no longer be regulating the contents of frozen cherry pie. The American people are free add extra fruit, sugar, and make the crust especially thick."

Newsweek (12/17, 2.67M) also reports.

CISA Says Likely Russian Cyberattack Compromised Agencies, Including NIH, And "Critical Infrastructure."

Norah O'Donnell reported on the CBS Evening News (12/17, story 6, 2:00, 4.49M), "The US is under cyberattack as federal officials warn a likely Russian-based hack has penetrated deep into US national security infrastructure. The breach is widespread, and there are growing concerns tonight about what may come next." CBS' Catherine Herridge: "Hackers thought to be linked to Russian intelligence are now feared to be deep inside American infrastructure networks across the US government, and including the nation's top nuclear laboratory."

Pierre Thomas said on ABC World News Tonight (12/17, story 6, 1:20, Muir, 7.31M), "Federal agencies scrambling, fearing enormous damage in what could be one of the largest cyberattacks in years." Pete Williams said on NBC Nightly News (12/17, story 7, 1:20, Holt, 6.27M), "A US security bulletin issued Thursday said [the cyberattack] poses a grave risk to the government and private sector, and said removing the infected computer code will be highly complex and challenging. The intrusion went undetected for nearly nine months, allowing the attackers to hunt for data in unclassified systems and read government emails." The AP (12/17, Fox) reports that the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency "said in its most detailed comments yet that the intrusion had compromised federal agencies as well as 'critical infrastructure' in a sophisticated attack that was hard to detect and will be difficult to undo." However, CISA "did not say which agencies or infrastructure had been breached or what information taken in an attack that it previously said appeared to have begun in March."

The Washington Post (12/17, Timberg, 10.52M) says, "For days it has been clear that compromised software patches distributed by a Texas-based company, SolarWinds, were central to Russian efforts to gain access into U.S. government computer systems. But Thursday's alert...said evidence suggested there was other malware used to initiate what the alert described as 'a grave risk to the Federal Government and state, local, tribal, and territorial governments as well as critical infrastructure entities and other private sector organizations.'" The Post notes parenthetically that the National Institutes of Health was among the government agencies breached by the attack. The Hill (12/17, Beavers, 5.69M), NPR (12/15, 3.69M), and the Washington Examiner (12/17, Dyke, 888K) also mention the NIH in their coverage of the hack.

USA Today (12/17, Johnson, Bomey, 12.7M) says the bulletin "represented the most striking assessment yet of a cascading threat to federal, state and local networks."

The New York Times (12/17, Sanger, Perlroth, 20.6M) reports, "Echoing the government's warning, Microsoft said Thursday that it had identified 40 companies, government agencies and think tanks that the suspected Russian hackers, at a minimum, stole data from. Nearly half are private technology firms, Microsoft said, many of them cybersecurity firms, like FireEye, that are charged with securing vast sections of the public and private sector."

The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Volz, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports Senate Finance Chairman Charles Grassley and ranking member Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) on Thursday sent a letter to IRS Commissioner Rettig requesting a briefing, writing, "Given the extreme

sensitivity of personal taxpayer information entrusted to the IRS, and the harm both to Americans' privacy and our national security that could result from the theft and exploitation of this data by our adversaries, it is imperative that we understand the extent to which the IRS may have been compromised."

In an appearance on Fox Business' After The Bell (12/17, 55K), White House Deputy Press Secretary Brian Morgenstern was asked about the hacking campaign that recently impacted FireEye and SolarWinds. Morgenstern said, "The Administration is very focused on this. We are aware of the reports and investigating. ... We have many professionals, of course, at Homeland Security and the National Security Council and at other various agencies very clued into this." Bloomberg (12/17, 3.57M) says President Trump "has yet to comment on the attacks." Roll Call (12/17, Ratnam, 130K), CNN (12/17, Liptak, 89.21M), Reuters (12/17, Menn), Axios (12/17, Knutson, 1.26M), Politico (12/17, Bertrand, 6.73M).

Fauci To Get An Honorary Degree From Bowdoin.

The Bangor (ME) Daily News (12/17, 178K) reports that NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, "who has been serving an infectious disease expert and White House adviser through much of the COVID-19 pandemic, will receive an honorary degree from Bowdoin this year." Fauci "has been serving an infectious disease expert and White House adviser through much of the COVID-19 pandemic."

NIH Changes Conflicts Of Interest Rules To Address Concerns About Foreign Influence.

Bloomberg Law (12/17, Baumann, Subscription Publication, 4K) reports from behind a paywall that under a pending change to the NIH's conflicts of interest policy, biomedical researchers would have to disclose ties to foreign collaborators.

Research Examines Liver's Zones Of Immune Defense.

Nature (12/17, Ray, 194K) reports, "new research from Anita Gola in the Germain laboratory at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, NIH, demonstrates that zonation in the liver extends to the immune cells, revealing that liver sinusoidal endothelial cells (LSECs) sense commensal bacteria to actively orchestrate localization of resident immune cells to promote host defence." The article quotes co-authors Gola and Ronald Germain saying, "Over the years, a wealth of imaging and functional studies have revealed that the complex lymphoid tissue microanatomy acts in concert with soluble and membrane-bound guidance factors to enable efficient innate and adaptive immune responses. Yet despite the presence of many immune cell types in non-lymphoid tissues (such as the liver), similar detailed quantitative descriptions of immune spatial organization are largely lacking."

Opinion: Postponing Routine Care Can Have A "Deadly Cost."

Pacific Research Institute president Sally Pipes writes for the Washington Examiner (12/17, 888K) that "postponing routine care" because of the pandemic "can have a very real and deadly cost." She writes, "UnitedHealth reports that its beneficiaries underwent nearly 1 million fewer

mammograms, colorectal cancer, and cervical cancer screenings in the first eight months of 2020 than in the same period last year." Pipes concludes that "it's obviously important for people to reduce their risk of being exposed to the coronavirus by staying home when possible, keeping their distance from others, and wearing a mask. But it's also important for them to continue to get routine care. Postponing such care indefinitely is not cost-free. It can be deadly." The article mentions a recent statement form National Cancer Institute Director Ned Sharpless in which he said of delaying routine cancer screenings, "There's really almost no way that doesn't turn into increased mortality."

Opioid Crisis

Sackler Family Members Denounced In Appearances Before House Panel.

The AP (12/17, Mulvihill) reports that on Thursday, "two of the owners of the company that makes OxyContin acknowledged to a congressional committee...that the powerful prescription painkiller has played a role in the national opioid crisis but stopped short of apologizing or admitting wrongdoing. 'I want to express my family's deep sadness about the opioid crisis,' David Sackler, a member of the family that owns Purdue Pharma, said at a rare appearance in a public forum." David Sackler added, "OxyContin is a medicine that Purdue intended to help people, and it has helped, and continues to help, millions of Americans." Kathe Sackler, David Sackler's cousin, told the House Oversight Committee, "I have tried to figure out if there's anything I could have done differently knowing what I knew then, not what I know now. There is nothing I can find that I would have done differently."

Politico (12/17, Niedzwiadek, 6.73M) reports that the Sacklers' testimony "rang hollow to most committee members, who noted that the family benefited immensely from the billions in profits OxyContin generated for the company they owned. 'To the Sackler family and Purdue Pharma, let me make this clear as I can be: You all are bad actors,' Rep. James Comer (R-Ky.) said." According to Politico, Purdue, "more than any other, has been blamed for driving the nation's opioid epidemic with its aggressive promotion of OxyContin." However, "Thursday's hearing was the first time the drug manufacturer's representatives have testified under oath before Congress about Purdue's role in the ongoing crisis."

Reuters (12/17, Spector) reports that David and Kathe Sackler, "among several Sackler family members with ownership interests in Purdue, agreed to testify only after the committee's chairwoman, Democratic Representative Carolyn Maloney, threatened subpoenas." Rep. James Cooper (D-TN) is quoted as saying, "Watching you testify makes my blood boil. I'm not sure that I'm aware of any family in America that's more evil than yours." According to Reuters, Purdue "reaped more than $30 billion from opioid sales over the years that enriched Sackler family members, and it funneled illegal kickbacks to doctors and pharmacies, investigations have found."

Also reporting are The Hill (12/17, Hellmann, 5.69M), NBC Nightly News (12/17, story 6, 1:55, Holt, 6.27M) , the Washington Post (12/17, Kornfield, 10.52M), the New York Times (12/17, Hoffman, 20.6M), and the Financial Times (12/17, Kuchler, Subscription Publication, 1.48M).

Health Care & Insurance Reform

Number Of Marylanders Who Enrolled In ACA Plans Hit New Record For 2021.

The Baltimore Sun (12/17, Cohn, 629K) reports about "166,000 Marylanders enrolled in health insurance created by the Affordable Care Act for 2021, a record level for the state's exchange, state officials said Thursday following the end of the signup period." Data show all counties and Baltimore City saw "increases in the insurance program known as Obamacare, with an overall jump of 4.5%, or 7,100 people, from this year."

Congressional Lawmakers Decide Not To Include Provisions Against Anticompetitive Practices In Healthcare Year-End Proposal.

Modern Healthcare (12/17, Cohrs, Subscription Publication, 215K) reports, "Lawmakers decided to eliminate provisions from an end-of-year proposal that would have prohibited anticompetitive healthcare contracting practices." The year-end proposal is not yet final, "but eight lawmakers that lead key committees didn't ask to curb gag clauses or various types of clauses that would make it difficult for plans to steer consumers to lower-cost or higher-quality providers."

Washington State Governor Proposes Tax On Health Insurers, Capital Gains Tax To Offset Budget Shortfall.

The AP (12/17, La Corte) reports, "Washington Gov. Jay Inslee is proposing a new capital gains tax and a tax on health insurers as part of his two-year, $57.6 billion budget proposal that seeks to offset the revenue losses the state has seen during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and to help bolster the state's public health system." Projections indicate the state would have a $3.3-billion shortfall by the middle of 2023. The article says one "new tax that Inslee is proposing is an assessment on health insurers, Medicaid managed care organizations, limited health services contractors and third-party administrators that would start in March 2022."

Human Services News

DOT Ruling Says Only Dogs Qualify As Service Animals.

The Los Angeles Times (12/17, Hester, 3.37M) reports the Department of Transportation earlier this month "ended years of mounting tension among passengers with disabilities, airlines, flight attendants and travelers." Under the department's Air Carrier Access Act, "which prevents airlines from discriminating against passengers with disabilities, a new ruling will strip many emotional support animals, or ESAs, of their service animal designation." The new DOT rule, "which will go into effect 30 days after the date of publication in the Federal Register (this could be weeks or months from now), defines a service animal as: 'A dog, regardless of breed or type, that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a qualified individual with a disability, including physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.'" Further, the rule "allows airlines to recognize emotional support animals as pets, rather than service animals." The Times adds, "No more emotional support cats out of their kennels at 30,000 feet. Air travel has gone to the dogs. The trained ones. The DOT ruling aims to keep it that way."

Financially-Stressed Child Welfare Contractor Spent $80,000 On Baseball Tickets, Whistleblower Says.

The AP (12/17) reports, "A cash-strapped Kansas foster care contractor that struggles to pay its bills and is under investigation for falsifying documents spent $80,000 on tickets to see the Chicago Cubs, owned by the family of Nebraska's governor, as it sought new business in that state, according to a whistleblower report." The contractor, "St. Francis Ministries, bought the tickets in 2019, including $65,000 worth of playoff tickets that it expected to be refunded for because the Cubs didn't make the playoffs." During the "same year, the agency was awarded a $197 million, five-year contract from the state of Nebraska to oversee the care of abused and neglected children in Douglas and Sarpy Counties in the Omaha area."

Reports Of Child Abuse In Massachusetts Fall Sharply During Pandemic.

The Boston Herald (12/17, Szaniszlo, 327K) says, "Reports of child abuse and neglect in Massachusetts have plummeted during the COVID-19 pandemic by more than 25 percent – a troubling indication, children's advocates fear, that cases are being missed."

Research Shows Rising IQ In Children With Autism.

Disability Scoop (12/18) reports that while IQ is "generally expected to remain stable over time," a new study published in the Journal of the American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry "suggests that the measure increases significantly for those with autism during adolescence and early adulthood." In the study, "IQ scores increased by an average of 7.48 points between the ages of 12 and 23. During the same period, autism symptoms in those studied remained unchanged."

Navy Hires Attorneys To Take Part In Pilot Program For Families With Dependents With Special-Needs.

Disability Scoop (12/18) reports the Navy has hired two civilian special education attorneys to take part in "a three-year pilot program to expand support for service members enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program." The attorneys "began in November to assist families trying to get services for children with special needs through federal laws put into practice differently in school districts across the country."

Food & Import Safety

Tesoros Trading Co Recalls Some Frozen Lightly Salted Edamame Over Potential Listeria Contamination.

CNN (12/17, Christensen, Asmelash, 89.21M) reports, "Tesoros Trading Co. is recalling some of its frozen Trader Joe's Lightly Salted Edamame products because they may be contaminated with listeria, according to an announcement from the US Food and Drug Administration on Wednesday."

Medicaid & CHIP

Florida Could See Medicaid Shortfall Of $1.25B Next Year Due To Increased Enrollment, Economists Say.

The Washington Examiner (12/16, Haughey, 888K) reports, "Florida's Medicaid enrollment could swell by 700,000 beneficiaries before 2022, increasing the state's costs by 19% and potentially presenting lawmakers in March with a $1.25 billion shortfall, according to projections by state economists." Economists projected in analyses published earlier this week that "4.59 million Floridians will be enrolled in Medicaid during fiscal year 2022, nearly 700,000 more than fiscal year 2020's enrollment of 3.9 million people." They also anticipate that, "beginning in fiscal year 2023, the state's Medicaid enrollment will decline by 2.3%, 1.9%, 1.8% and 1.8% in succeeding years to about 4.24 million in 2026, shedding nearly 350,000 people from the projected 4.59 million peak in fiscal 2022."

"Arcane Legislative Rules" Prevent Ohio Medicaid Director From Testifying Online About PBMs.

The Columbus (OH) Dispatch (12/17, Rowland, 526K) reports, "Skeptical members of a state oversight panel wanted one more crack Thursday morning at a state plan to rein in pharmacy benefit managers." However, "that hope ran aground when they discovered late Wednesday evening that arcane legislative rules do not allow a witness to testify online before a standing legislative committee, even during a pandemic." This means that "COVID-19, which has stricken a few state lawmakers lately, gets the blame for sinking scheduled testimony from Ohio Medicaid Director Maureen Corcoran."

Health & Medical News

Biogen Agrees To Pay $22 Million To Settle US Drug Charity Kickback Investigation.

Reuters (12/17, Raymond) reports, "Biogen Inc has agreed to pay $22 million to resolve U.S. allegations that it illegally used two charities that help cover Medicare patients' out-of-pocket drug costs as a means to pay them kickbacks to use its multiple sclerosis drugs."

US Labs Seeing Far Less Influenza Than In Past Years.

The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Abbott, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that the US is seeing far less influenza this year than in past years, and CDC influenza division director Daniel Jernigan credits efforts to combat COVID-19.

Over 370 International Spiritual Leaders Sign Joint Declaration Calling For End To LGBTQ Conversion Therapy.

The New York Times (12/16, Morales, 20.6M) reports, "In a show of unity aimed at fighting for the rights of L.G.B.T.Q. people, more than 370 international spiritual leaders have signed a declaration demanding a global ban on disputed conversion therapy." The joint "declaration also asked that nations find a way to end the criminalization of people based on their sexual orientation or gender

identity," and "called for an end to violence against L.G.B.T.Q. people." The joint "pledge was signed by religious leaders from more than 35 countries," and "was led by the Global Interfaith Commission on LGBT+ Lives initiative, in a bid 'to affirm the sanctity of life and dignity of all.'"

Pulse Oximeters May Be More Likely To Give Inaccurate Readings For Black People, Researchers Say.

The Hill (12/17, Budryk, 5.69M) reports, "A medical device that measures oxygen blood levels is more likely to give misleading or inaccurate results to Black patients, according to research published Thursday in the New England Journal of Medicine." Researchers "analyzed data from thousands of adult patients who received supplemental oxygen at the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor, comparing the data to that of 37,000 patients at about 200 other hospitals' intensive care units." The finger-worn pulse oximeter, "they found, was more likely to return inaccurate results for Black users based on comparisons of the data to a test that takes arterial blood samples."

Toxic Fumes Appear To Leak Into Airplane Air Supply More Frequently Than Previously Thought, Research Indicates.

The Los Angeles Times (12/17, 3.37M) reports that "for decades, the airline industry and its regulators have known about incidents of toxic gases from jet engine oil and other fluids leaking into the air supply on planes." But the Federal Aviation Administration "doesn't track these fume events. And airlines aren't required to report information needed to answer basic questions." The Times "turned to a database of safety reports voluntarily made to NASA by pilots and flight attendants" to help answer those questions. The Times' analysis "of NASA safety reports alone counted 362 fume events reported in 2018 and 2019, nearly 400 crew members or passengers who received medical attention and four dozen pilots who were described as impaired to the point of being unable to perform their duties."

The Los Angeles Times (12/17, 3.37M) reports separately. The Hill (12/17, Budryk, 5.69M) and The Verge (12/17, 1.54M) also provide coverage.

FDA Warns Consumers Not To Use Nearly 50 Male Enhancing, Weight Loss Products Sold Online.

Newsweek (12/17, 2.67M) reports that the FDA "is warning consumers to not use nearly 50 male enhancement or weight loss products sold on Amazon and eBay after the agency found hidden, dangerous ingredients in them." The agency "said all of the products purchased from Amazon and 80 percent of those purchased off eBay contained 'undeclared active pharmaceutical ingredients.'"

Hospitals Introducing AI Without Educating Employees About It.

STAT (12/17, Brodwin, 262K) reports hospitals are making increased use of artificial intelligence and their employees "are increasingly being asked to incorporate experimental AI systems into their workflows," and to do so "without a transparent explanation of how the tools work — or clear

education on how to use them." As a result, "nurses and doctors...told STAT that the process has sowed confusion, frustration, and concern."

Former J&J Executive Files Sexual Discrimination And Harassment Suit.

STAT (12/17, Silverman, 262K) reports Gina Bilotti, "a 25-year veteran Johnson & Johnson (JNJ) executive, has accused the health care giant of persistent sexual discrimination and harassment," including a "ruthless pattern of retaliation." Bilotti alleges that the "highest levels of J&J management participated in and condoned the retaliation," including CEO Alex Gorsky.

Opinion: Congress Pursuing Contradictory Messaging In Approaches To Marijuana, Nicotine.

In a Washington Examiner (12/17, 888K) op-ed, Reason Foundation Director of Consumer Freedom Guy Bentley writes, "Congress is pursuing divergent and contradictory paths for nicotine and marijuana regulation. A majority of Republicans voted against" a measure that would have banned all flavored tobacco products, "while most Democrats did the reverse. The opposite was the case for the MORE Act," also known as the Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement Act. Bentley concludes, "Congress must work for safer, regulated markets for both nicotine and marijuana and avoid repeating the mistakes of the drug war with e-cigarettes, menthols, and smokeless tobacco."

Global Health

Spain's Parliament Approves Bill To Allow Physician-Assisted Suicide For Long-Suffering Patients Of Incurable Diseases.

The AP (12/17) reports, "Spain's parliament voted Thursday to approve a bill that will allow physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia for long-suffering patients of incurable diseases or unbearable permanent conditions." The bill now moves to "the Senate where it is also expected to pass." Based on the language "of the law approved by the lower house, it won't go into effect until three months after being published in the government gazette."

Opinion: Family Planning, Basic Health Services Investments Needed To Prevent Maternal Deaths Around Globe.

In an op-ed for the Los Angeles Times (12/17, Lomborg, 3.37M), Bjorn Lomborg, president of the Copenhagen Consensus and a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, argues that his group's "new research uses cost-benefit analysis to determine which policies would be most cost-effective at preventing maternal and newborn death during childbirth." Two such "interventions stood out as the best investments for new spending," namely, "family planning and what is known as basic emergency obstetric and newborn care."

National News

Trump Reiterates His Intention To Veto NDAA.

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CNBC (12/17, Macias, Breuninger, 7.34M) reports on its website that on Thursday, President Trump "said...he will reject the sweeping defense bill that authorizes a topline of $740 billion in spending and outlines Pentagon policy." Trump tweeted, "I will Veto the Defense Bill, which will make China very unhappy. They love it. Must have Section 230 termination, protect our National Monuments and allow for removal of military from far away, and very unappreciative, lands. Thank you!"

Politico (12/17, Ferris, O'Brien, Caygle, 6.73M) says Congress "is gearing up for the first veto override" of Donald Trump's presidency. Congressional leaders "are scrambling to avoid an unusual scenario in which lawmakers are summoned back to Washington in the days between Christmas and New Year's for a dramatic, eleventh-hour vote to overturn Trump's promised veto." Bloomberg (12/17, 3.57M) says "a Senate vote on overriding...Trump's expected veto of a massive defense bill may prove to be a final test of the Republican party's loyalty to the commander-in-chief." Senate Armed Services Chairman James Inhofe said he expects the Senate "would return to hold a vote" if the House overrides the President.

WSJournal Says Bill Must Include Tomahawk Missiles. The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says in an editorial that Congress should adopt a final version of the bill that allocates about $100 million that the Marines are seeking for Tomahawk missiles, arguing that the appropriation is essential for keeping China in check.

NYTimes Analysis: Trump Judges More Conservative Than Other GOP-Appointed Peers.

The New York Times (12/17, Ruiz, Gebeloff, 20.6M) reports that President Trump's "conservative imprint...on the federal courts is only deepening." An analysis of decisions by the "appellate bench – where nearly all contested federal litigation ends – shows the transformation of the judiciary" under Trump. A Times review of "more than 10,000 published decisions and dissents during the first three years of the Trump administration" found that Trump's "picks for the appeals courts were more likely than past Republican appointees to disagree with peers selected by Democrats, and more likely to agree with their Republican colleagues, suggesting they were more consistently conservative."

Tuberville Could Join House Members In Effort To Contest Electoral Vote Count.

USA Today (12/17, Garrison, 12.7M) reports Sen.-elect Tommy Tuberville (R-AL) said this week that he may join members of the House in objecting to Joe Biden's victory when Congress meets to affirm the Electoral College vote on January 6, despite Senate Majority Leader McConnell's warning to GOP senators against doing so. Tuberville said, "You'll see what's coming. You've been reading about in the House. We're going to have to do it in the Senate." Alabama Live (12/17, 497K) reports Tuberville campaign chairman Stan McDonald said, "I don't know yet if or when he will do this. He's very seriously considering it."

Kemp Says He And His Family Have Received "Death Threats." The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (12/17, 1.46M) reports Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp (R) "is fed up with the unrelenting attacks from conspiracy theorists calling on him to overturn [Biden's] victory in Georgia. But he's even more enraged that some of those peddlers of false claims are targeting his wife and three daughters."

Kemp said, "It has gotten ridiculous – from death threats, [claims of] bribes from China, the social media posts that my children are getting."

Rice Defeats Ocasio-Cortez For Energy And Commerce Seat.

Politico (12/17, Ferris, Caygle, 6.73M) reports Rep. Kathleen Rice (D-NY) "has captured a prized seat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee after a contentious showdown" with Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY). Rice "ultimately won in a lopsided vote of 46-13" in secret balloting in the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee. Politico says the two had "been battling behind the scenes for weeks to secure one of the few open seats" on the committee.

Pence Campaigns For GOP Senate Candidates In Georgia.

The Washington Post (12/17, Sonmez, 10.52M) reports that on Thursday, Vice President Pence "made another trip to Georgia" to campaign for Sens. Kelly Loeffler (R-GA) and David Perdue (R-GA). Pence "pledged that the Republican ticket would 'keep fighting' to reverse the election results but tacitly acknowledged the prospect of a Biden presidency. ... 'A Republican Senate majority could be the last line of defense to preserve all that we've done for this country,' Pence told a crowd in Columbus that greeted him with chants of 'four more years.'"

The AP (12/17, Nadler, Barrow) says Pence is "seemingly holding rallies everywhere in Georgia lately – except Atlanta and its inner suburbs." The AP reports that Pence "returned Thursday for events in Columbus, on the state's western edge, and Macon, in middle Georgia." Pence "previously stopped in Augusta in the east, Savannah on the coast and the north Georgia cities of Gainesville and Canton, in the far reaches of metro Atlanta's exurbs." The Hill (12/17, Samuels, 5.69M) and the Fox News (12/17, Steinhauser, 23.99M) website also cover Pence's visit.

Nearly 76,000 New Georgia Voters Have Registered Since Election. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (12/17, 1.46M) reports, "Nearly 76,000 new voters registered in Georgia since before the presidential election, enough to make a difference in the U.S. Senate runoffs if they turn out." However, "just 2,670 of the new voters have cast ballots in the runoffs through Tuesday, most of them during in-person early voting this week."

Polls Getting Little Attention In Race. The New York Times (12/17, Russonello, 20.6M) writes that there is little focus on polling in the race. No public pollster "has completed a live telephone survey in the Georgia runoffs," and "representatives from campaigns on both sides of the aisle said that they didn't have a big appetite for horse race polls this time around, since the races will almost certainly be close."

GOP Could Have Flipped House With Fewer Than 32,000 Votes In Key Districts.

Inside Elections (12/17) observes that if GOP leads in IA2 and NY22 stand, "Republicans will be five seats shy of a [House] majority. In the five closest races won by Democrats, the Republican candidates lost by a combined 31,751 votes."

Biden Chooses Haaland For Interior Secretary.

The AP (12/17, Knickmeyer) reports Joe Biden will nominate Rep. Deb Haaland (D-NM) for interior secretary, "a historic pick that would make her the first Native American to lead the powerful federal agency that has wielded influence over the nation's tribes for generations." ABC World News Tonight (12/17, story 7, 0:15, Muir, 7.31M) also called it "a historic Cabinet nomination" that would make Haaland "the first Native American appointed to a Cabinet position."

The Washington Post (12/17, Grandoni, 10.52M) says progressives "launched an unusual public campaign to place an American Indian at the helm of Interior." The New York Times (12/17, Davenport, 20.6M) says if confirmed, Haaland will lead "an agency that for much of the nation's history played a central role in the dislocation and abuse of Indigenous communities from coast to coast." The Albuquerque (NM) Journal (12/17, 188K) reports Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez "called it a 'historic and unprecedented day' for all indigenous people, pointing out the Interior Department oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education."

The Los Angeles Times (12/17, 3.37M) says Haaland would also "take over a department mired in controversy over the Trump administration's campaign to open up sensitive land and offshore areas to oil and gas development. She will also be responsible for implementing Biden's promise to end oil and gas leasing on land controlled by the federal government – a move certain to face backlash from oil-dependent states, including her own, and lawsuits from the fossil fuel industry." Reuters (12/17, Hunnicutt, Renshaw), the Santa Fe New Mexican (12/17, Wyland, 65K), Axios (12/17, Nichols, McCammond, Swan, 1.26M), Politico (12/17, Pager, Thompson, 6.73M), The Hill (12/17, Beitsch, 5.69M), Roll Call (12/17, Hulac, 130K), and the CNN (12/17, Zeleny, Merica, Krieg, Lee, 89.21M) and Fox News (12/17, McFall, 23.99M) websites also cover the selection.

Biden Picks Regan For EPA. The AP (12/17, Knickmeyer, Robertson) reports Biden has nominated North Carolina Secretary of Environmental Quality Michael Regan to head the EPA. Regan "has made a name pursuing cleanups of industrial toxins and helping low-income and minority communities hit hardest by pollution." The Raleigh (NC) News & Observer (12/17, 396K) reports, "One source familiar with the transition's thinking said that Regan was chosen in part due to his work holding polluters accountable, citing his leadership reaching the largest coal-ash clean-up settlement in U.S. history with Duke Energy."

Politico (12/17, Pager, Colman, Guillén, 6.73M) reports, "For weeks, California regulator Mary Nichols was seen as the top contender for the job, but environmental justice groups argued that she had not worked aggressively enough to address systemic pollution problems in communities of color and low-income areas." The New York Times (12/17, Friedman, 20.6M) says Regan "was not [Biden's] first choice, and he lacks some of the political star power of Mr. Biden's other cabinet picks. But he will be on the front lines of the incoming administration's effort to undo one of President Trump's most sprawling transformations of the federal government: the unraveling of a half-century of pollution and climate regulations, and the diminishment of the science that underpinned them."

Townhall (12/17, O'Brien, 359K) writes, "Much has been made of the diversity that appears to be making up Biden's cabinet. For instance, the media were quick to praise Biden for picking Buttigieg as the first openly gay nominee for a cabinet post, but conservatives noted that former

ambassador to Germany and acting Director of National Intelligence Richard Grenell became the first openly gay cabinet member in February of 2020." The Washington Post (12/17, Dennis, Mufson, Eilperin, 10.52M), the Wall Street Journal (12/17, Puko, Collins, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), and Axios (12/17, Nichols, 1.26M) also cover the choice.

Iger Wants To Be Ambassador To China. The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Schwartzel, Glazer, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports Walt Disney Co. Executive Chairman Bob Iger has told Biden's team that he is interested in serving as ambassador to China, sources said.

Blinken Attends Meetings And Briefings At State Department. The Washington Post (12/17, Sonmez, 10.52M) reports that on Thursday, Secretary of State-designate Tony Blinken "attended meetings and briefings" at the State Department for the first time. The Post says the briefings "happened despite the lack of an acknowledgment" by Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo "that Biden won the election."

O'Malley Dillon Says She "Could Have Chosen Better" Words. USA Today (12/17, Behrmann, 12.7M) reports incoming Deputy Chief of Staff Jen O'Malley Dillon on Thursday "backpedaled on calling congressional Republicans an expletive." O'Malley Dillon said, "I used some words that I probably could have chosen better." Politico (12/17, Forgey, Choi, 6.73M) reports O'Malley Dillon "argued that 'the point that I was really making...is an incredibly important point. And that really is about the president-elect and why he was supported by over 81 million people, and what they were looking for.' She went on to restate Biden's belief that we can get things done, and we can get them done if we come together.'"

Editorial Wrap-Up

Washington Post.

"D.C.'s Epidemic Of Gun Violence Is A Public Health Emergency." The Washington Post (12/17, 10.52M) says that though "'epidemic' is the word that is most commonly used by D.C. officials" to describe gun violence in the city that has risen by 34%, "action has failed to match rhetoric." The Post argues, "The alarming spike in shootings and killings...is a public health emergency that needs to be treated as such, with urgency, resources and data-driven strategies." The Post urges District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser (D) and District councilmembers to "make reduction of gun violence a top priority" and "commission a task force – with outside experts and members of the community – to come up with a comprehensive plan that is driven by data and informed by what has worked."

"Trump's Mideast Deals Are Good For Israel. But They Involve Bad Trade-Offs." The Washington Post (12/17, 10.52M) says the Middle East deals negotiated by the Trump Administration involve "major concessions by the United States on unrelated issues." The Post says the "bribes Mr. Trump has had the United States pay for the upgrading of Israel's relations are troubling." Trump's "reckless dispensation of these favors" will leave Joe Biden "with some difficult choices. He will want to preserve Israel's diplomatic gains." But the improved ties "should not require quid pro quos by the United States on other issues – especially when, as in the case of the Western Sahara, they are bad policy on their own merits."

Wall Street Journal.

"Hijacking The Fed To Bail Out States." The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says Democrats oppose the language Sen. Pat Toomey (R-PA) is pushing to terminate the Federal Reserve's pandemic lending facilities because it would interfere with their plan to use the Fed to circumvent Congress if they do not win control of the Senate. Arguing that Democrats want to use the Fed's municipal and state lending facility as a means to bail out states and cities, the Journal urges Republicans to insist the language Toomey wants be included in the relief bill.

"School Choice: Better Than Prozac." The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) highlights a new study published in School Effectiveness and School Improvement that found a 10% decrease in suicide rates for teenagers in states with charter school legislation. The Journal says the study is particularly timely during the pandemic, when students have seen a decline in learning and mental health, and concludes that while reopening would provide immediate relief, school choice would offer longer-term benefits.

"The Marines' Missile Imperative." The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says that Congress should adopt a final version of the bill that allocates about $100 million that the Marines are seeking for Tomahawk missiles, arguing that the appropriation is essential for keeping China in check.

"Narendra Modi's Reform Drama." The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) credits Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts to reform India's agriculture system. While India has seen protests against the reforms, the Journal says they will improve millions of lives.

The Big Picture

Headlines From Today's Front Pages.

Wall Street Journal:

Moderna's Covid-19 Vaccine Gets Backing From FDA Advisory Panel
Hack Suggests New Scope, Sophistication For Cyberattacks
More States Hit Google Over Alleged Monopoly Conduct
Roku Torments Entertainment Giants In Quest To Dominate Streaming
Matching Christmas Pajamas Are Either The Best Or Worst Part Of The Holidays
Nigerian Boys Taken In Kidnapping Claimed By Boko Haram Are Freed

New York Times:

Biden Faces Challenge as Congress Drops State Aid to Secure Stimulus
More Hacking Attacks Found As Officials Warn Of 'Grave Risk' To US Government
FDA Panel Endorses Moderna's Covid-19 Vaccine
Some Health Care Workers Are Getting the Vaccine. Others Aren't. Who Decides?

Biden Picks Deb Haaland To Lead Interior Department
Even When The Music Returns, Pandemic Pay Cuts Will Linger

Washington Post:
Approval Of Second Vaccine Expected
Stimulus Talks Expected To Spill Over To Weekend
Historic Picks Put Focus On Environmental Justice
Africa Watches, And Waits
New Tactics Utilized In Hack

Financial Times:
Emmanuel Macron Tests Positive For Coronavirus
EU And China Revive Hopes Of Investment Deal This Year
US Says Cyber Hack Poses 'Grave Risk' To Critical Infrastructure

Washington Times:
Secret Weapon: GOP Turns To Georgia Evangelicals To Save Senate Majority
New Shutdowns Threaten Small Businesses, Economic Recovery As Congress Squabbles Over Relief
'Trumpian Politics': Army Straight Shooter Navigates Wide Ranging Civilian-Military Minefield
'Toss Out Aggression': Ax-Throwing Club Provides 'Satisfying' Pandemic Outlet
Small Business Owners Buck Gretchen Whitmer's Shutdown: 'We Don't Have Any Other Option'
North Face Accused Of 'Virtue-Signaling' For Refusing Oil-And-Gas Firm's Jacket Order

Story Lineup From Last Night's Network News:
ABC: Vaccines; COVID Surge; Winter Storm; Congress-Relief Bill; Chicago-Social Worker Wrongfully Raided By Police; Russia-Cyberattack; Biden-Sec. of Interior; Tiger Woods-PNC Championship; Made In America Christmas.
CBS: COVID Surge; Vaccines; Winter Storm; Congress-Relief Bill; Biden-Hunter Biden; Russia-Cyberattack; Chicago-Social Worker Wrongfully Raided By Police; NFL-Super Bowl; School Custodian Receives Kidney From 3rd Grade Teacher.
NBC: Vaccines; COVID Surge; Congress-Relief Bill; Winter Storm; Chicago-Social Worker Wrongfully Raided By Police; Perdue Pharma; Russia-Cyberattack; Olympics; Holiday Shipping; Coronavirus Origins; 5th Grade Teacher Inspires Students.

Network TV At A Glance:
Vaccines – 9 minutes, 40 seconds
COVID Surge – 9 minutes, 20 seconds
Congress-Relief Bill – 4 minutes, 50 seconds
Russia-Cyberattack – 4 minutes, 40 seconds
Chicago-Social Worker Wrongfully Raided By Police – 3 minutes, 20 seconds

Story Lineup From This Morning's Radio News Broadcasts:
ABC: COVID Surge; Alex Azar-Wife Tests Positive; Moderna Vaccine; Pfizer Vaccine Shipments; Congress-Relief Bill.
CBS: COVID Surge; Moderna Vaccine; Pfizer Vaccine Shipments; Congress-Relief Bill; Winter Storm; Biden-Cabinet Nominees.
FOX: Moderna Vaccine; Johnson & Johnson Vaccine; COVID Surge; Russia-Cyberattack.
NPR: Moderna Vaccine; COVID Surge; Biden-EPA Nominee; Georgia-Runoffs.

Last Laughs

Late Night Political Humor.

Jimmy Kimmel: "Mike Pence is expected to get his first of two Pfizer shots tomorrow. He and his wife Karen are doing it on television to show that the vaccine is safe. I guess the thinking is, if it's good enough for America's first Karen, it should be good enough for the rest of them too."

Jimmy Kimmel: "But this is exciting for Mike Pence. Getting vaccinated is the only time Mother ever does shots with him."

Jimmy Kimmel: "It's worth mentioning that Mike Pence, who is the head of the COVID task force, wrote an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal six months ago saying there would be no second wave of the virus, this is nothing but hysteria from the media. So maybe save that dose for someone else. The only cure Mike Pence should get is a bottle of Clorox and a heat lamp."

Jimmy Kimmel: "Only 34 more days to go. We're now on what feels like 200 days of 'Squattergate.' Trump has been floating the idea that he will refuse to leave office, as if that is even an option. As if this was like a bad roommate situation."

Jimmy Kimmel: "Here's a fun thing for those who might be looking for a holiday gift. The mayor of Atlantic City is auctioning off the chance to blow up one of Donald Trump's former casinos, for real. The money will go to charity. The closed Plaza Casino is scheduled to get demolished. Whoever donates the most money gets to push the button. We should chip in and get this for Hillary Clinton, right?"

Jimmy Kimmel: "Of course, the easiest way to make a Trump casino implode is to just put Trump back in charge of running it again."

Stephen Colbert: "Here's the deal: Pharmacists have found that when they used glass vials that were supposed to contain five doses, sometimes they can squeeze out an additional dose. ... And we're going to need that extra vaccine, because the White House is sticking with its pandemic plan of 'not having a plan.'"

Stephen Colbert: "Yesterday, we learned of emails from one of the President's health appointees, former HHS science adviser Paul Alexander. ... This summer, Alexander urged top health officials

to adopt a 'herd immunity' approach to COVID-19 and allow millions of Americans to be infected by the virus, thereby changing the Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Hell and Human Sacrifice. Because here's the thing about Paul Alexander's strategy: It would require almost three million deaths to reach herd immunity. If your plan to save humanity involves killing millions of people, you're not a health adviser. You're a Marvel villain."

Stephen Colbert: "In the face of the COVID raging, the President-elect is asking Americans to stay home [for his inauguration]. If enough people do the right thing, his inauguration could end up looking a lot like the last one."

Stephen Colbert: "If they do manage to pry the current President from the White House, he may need to find a different place to live because residents surrounding Mar-a-Lago recently sent the town a letter with a message for the outgoing-commander-in-chief: We don't want you to be our neighbor. It's all in the new documentary, 'Won't You Suck It, Neighbor?'"

Jimmy Fallon: "Yesterday, the FDA said the Pfizer vaccine vials hold extra doses, which could expand the national supply by up to 40 percent. To explain it to Trump, they said it's like finding an extra McNugget in your 20-piece."

Jimmy Fallon: "Today, Pfizer said that it has millions more doses in a warehouse, but the government hasn't given them instructions on where to send them. Well, it finally happened. Trump made his first mistake dealing with the coronavirus. Seriously, not a good sign that we're gonna need the Domino's pizza tracker for the vaccine."

Jimmy Fallon: "Congressional leaders are nearing a compromise on a $900 billion COVID stimulus deal that is set to include $600 checks per person. I think it would go a long way – for anyone paying $50 a month in rent. Six hundred dollars? Come on. If you're not going to give anyone real money, just send everyone a PS5."

Jimmy Fallon: "In January, Atlantic City is blowing up a former Trump casino, and the highest bidder in a live auction will be the one to press the button. I say we hold Biden's inauguration in Atlantic City, and then let him push the button."

Jimmy Fallon: "You know that two seconds before they do it, Eric Trump is going to wander out of the front door like, 'Is the event not inside?'"

James Corden: "Vice President Mike Pence is about to find himself in quite an uncomfortable situation. On January 6, he has to appear in front of Congress to confirm Joe Biden's victory over Donald Trump. Well, word has just come out that Pence will then immediately travel to the Middle East to avoid the wrath of Trump and his supporters."

Jimmy Fallon: "You know things are turbulent in the White House when you go to the Middle East for a bit of peace and quiet. He is stopping in Bahrain and Israel. He's then headed off to Poland, or as Mike Pence calls that, a real tropical getaway."

Jimmy Fallon: "Pence said he will be receiving the COVID-19 vaccine injection tomorrow live on television. ... Now as you know, the vaccine has to be kept at super cold temperatures, so I'm sure it is going to do just fine inside Mike Pence."

Jimmy Fallon: "But Pence will publicly receive the vaccine to promote its safety and build confidence among the American people. And nothing promotes confidence quite like getting the vaccine and then immediately fleeing the country."

Seth Meyers: "President Trump attacked Fox News on Twitter yesterday and said he, quote, 'can't believe how badly Fox News is doing in the ratings.' Really? You can't? You were their number one show, and you got canceled."

Seth Meyers: "White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said this week that President Trump plans to veto the $740 billion defense spending bill, despite passing Congress with a veto-proof majority. Said Trump, 'How many times do I have to say it? I don't understand how any of this works.'"

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• GlaxoSmithKline, Vir Look To Succeed Where Lilly Failed With NIH Antibody Study In Hospitalized Covid-19 Patients.
• Don't Fall For Big Pharma's Savior Act.
• Without Resources, Vaccine Rollout Could 'Fall At The Last Hurdle,' Journalist Warns.
• Biden And Lawmakers Raise Alarms Over Cyber-Breach Amid Trump Silence.

Health & Medical News

• Sackler Family Members Denounced In Appearances Before House Panel.
• Biogen Agrees To Pay $22 Million To Settle US Drug Charity Kickback Investigation.
• US Labs Seeing Far Less Influenza Than In Past Years.
• Over 370 International Spiritual Leaders Sign Joint Declaration Calling For End To LGBTQ Conversion Therapy.
• Pulse Oximeters May Be More Likely To Give Inaccurate Readings For Black People, Researchers Say.
• Toxic Fumes Appear To Leak Into Airplane Air Supply More Frequently Than Previously Thought, Research Indicates.
• FDA Warns Consumers Not To Use Nearly 50 Male Enhancing, Weight Loss Products Sold Online.
• Hospitals Introducing AI Without Educating Employees About It.
• Former J&J Executive Files Sexual Discrimination And Harassment Suit.
• Opinion: Congress Pursuing Contradictory Messaging In Approaches To Marijuana, Nicotine.
• Illinois Senator Praises Operation Warp Speed's Vaccine Rollout.
• New Filings For Unemployment Rose To 885,000 Last Week, Data Show.

• Trump Was Reportedly Pushing For Stimulus Checks For As Much As $2,000 Per Person.
• Analysis: Lack Of State, Local Aid In COVID-19 Stimulus Package Will Likely Result In More Damage To The Economy.
• Analysis: Stimulus Checks In Next COVID-19 Stimulus Package Not Enough To Pay Average Month's Rent In Any State.
• Commentary Examines GOP's, Dems' Motivations In Negotiating COVID-19 Stimulus Package.
• Commentary: McConnell May Be Undermining Biden By Omitting Aid For State, Local Governments From Stimulus Package.
• Commentary Says Dems Opposed Liability Shield In COVID-19 Stimulus Package Because "Personal Injury Lawyers Won't Allow It."
• Commentary Urges Congress To Pass COVID-19 Stimulus Package And Immediately Begin Work On The Next One.
• LATimes: McConnell Most Likely Prodded By Partisan Interests To Negotiate On COVID-19 Relief Package.
• California Rocked By Record Surge In COVID-19 Cases.
• California Hospital Systems Strain Under COVID-19 Surge.
• Complaint: Hundreds Of Long Beach Police Gathered Maskless In Close Proximity At November Event.
• Arizona Reports Nearly 6,000 New Cases Thursday.
• Analysis: COVID-19 Hitting US In Series Of Waves.
• COVID-19 Latest In Series Of Health Crises Faced By Marshall Islanders.
• Rural Hospital Systems In Nevada Facing Strain From COVID-19 Cases.
• Utah Reports Record High 30 Daily COVID-19 Deaths Thursday.
• Nurses Say Rising COVID-19 Hospitalizations In New York Straining Staff.
• COVID-19 Claims Lives Of Eight Wisconsin Nuns At Retirement Home.
• Louisiana Reports Significant Spike In COVID-19 Hospitalizations.
• Nevada Health Officials Warn Improving COVID-19 Trends May Be Temporary.
• DC Mayor Eases Christmas COVID-19 Restrictions Amid Lawsuit.
• Florida Governor Faces Sharp Criticism Over COVID-19 Decisions.
• Georgia Governor Says State Will Continue Paying For Extra Nursing Staff.
• Report Details Lingering COVID-19 Risks To New York Nursing Homes.
• As Vaccine Rollout Begins, California's Orange County Likely To Stay Locked Down For Another Month.
• Michigan House Votes To Limit Duration Of State Health Department's Emergency Powers.
• San Bernardino County Sues California Governor Over COVID-19 Restrictions.
• EMA Moves Forward Date Of Meeting To Assess Moderna's COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Russian COVID-19 Vaccine Receives Mixed Response.
• Putin Unsure About Taking COVID-19 Vaccine Due To Lack Of Testing In His Age Group.
• Opinion: Legacies Of Tuskegee Syphilis Study, COVID-19 Remind Us To Listen To Patients Reluctant About Medical Treatment.
• Trusted Messengers Could Boost COVID-19 Vaccination Efforts Among Communities Hit Hard By COVID-19, Surveys Show.
• Some Healthcare Workers, First Responders Reluctant To Take COVID-19 Vaccine.

• Commentary Urges Americans To Get Vaccinated Following FDA Panel's Recommendation To Grant EUA For Moderna's Vaccine.
• J&J Has Fully Enrolled Participants For First Late-Stage Trial Of COVID-19 Vaccine.
• BioNTech Chief Medical Officer Said Company's Choice To Move To Battling COVID-19 Happened Over Breakfast.
• COVID-19 Vaccinations Arrive At Long-Term Care Facilities In Some States.
• Government, Drugmakers Working Together To Create Network Of Detection Systems, Monitoring Devices Amid Vaccine Rollout.
• Rite Aid Teaming Up With CDC To Administer COVID-19 Vaccines.
• Some Americans Say They Plan To Wait To Get Coronavirus Vaccine; Experts Say That Is Not Necessary.
• COVID-19 Vaccines Reportedly Being Distributed Under "Unprecedented" Security Measures.
• Professors Call FDA's Staffing Of Review Of Pfizer/BioNTech Vaccine Inadequate.
• Confusion Reigns Over Issue Of Consent In Nursing Home Vaccinations.
• Pfizer To Seek Approval Of COVID-19 Vaccine In Japan.
• SEC Sues Decision Diagnostics Corp For Allegedly Misleading Investors On COVID-19 Tests.
• Vice President Expected To Receive Coronavirus Vaccine On Camera Friday Morning.
• Iowa To Get Fewer Vaccine Doses Than Promised, Moves Ahead With Relaxing Restrictions.
• Michigan To Receive Fewer Doses Of Pfizer Vaccine Next Week Than State Received This Week, State Officials Say.
• Oregon To Get Fewer Doses Of Pfizer Vaccine Than Planned Next Week, State Health Officials Say.
• Washington Governor Says State To Receive 40% Fewer Vaccine Doses Than Expected Next Week.
• Texas Governor Vows "No More Shutdowns" As Hospitalizations Continue To Rise In State.
• Tennessee Governor Touts Vaccine Distribution, But Says Residents Need To Remain Vigilant.
• Juneau Extends Mask Requirement For At Least Six More Months.
• Opinion: States Need To Deliver Coronavirus Vaccine To At-Risk Elders Living At Home.
• Tennessee Only State To Set Aside Portion Of Coronavirus Vaccine Shipment As Reserve.
• Oklahoma Governor Moves Teachers Higher On Priority List For Coronavirus Vaccine.
• Memphis Physician Warns Tennessee Is One Of Worst Regions For COVID-19 Transmission.
• DC Healthcare Workers, First Responders Get Coronavirus Vaccine.
• Colorado Unveils Program Giving Restaurants, Other Businesses Way To Loosen Vaccine Restrictions.
• San Francisco To Mandate Quarantine For Anyone Arriving From Outside Bay Area.
• Judge Rules New York City Mayor Must Hand Over Documents Related To Handling Of Pandemic.
• Maryland Governor Orders Those Traveling To, From State To Test Negative For COVID-19 Or Quarantine.
• Study: Pandemic Restrictions Cost 500,000 California Workers Their Jobs.
• Nevada Official Tells Panel State Expects To See New COVID-19 Surge Over Holidays.
• Some Wyoming Bars Are Ignoring Statewide Mandate To Close Earlier.
• California Panel Discusses Putting First Responders, Teachers, Farmworkers Next In Line For Vaccine.
• Michigan Lawmakers Reinstate Moratorium On Water Shutoffs Through March.
• Supreme Court Denies Christian School's Request To Be Exempt From School Closures Amid Pandemic.

Global Health News

• Spain's Parliament Approves Bill To Allow Physician-Assisted Suicide For Long-Suffering Patients Of Incurable Diseases.
• Opinion: Family Planning, Basic Health Services Investments Needed To Prevent Maternal Deaths Around Globe.
• UN Secretary-General Warns Against "Vaccinationalism" Amid Pandemic.
• Oxford's COVID-19 Vaccine Has Strong Immune Response Under Two Full-Dose Regime, Early Trials Find.
• EU Plans To Begin Administering COVID-19 Vaccines As Early As December 27.
• New Zealand Offers Neighboring Nations Free COVID-19 Vaccines.
• Germany Faces Worsening Coronavirus Situation Each Week.
• Sweden's King Criticizes Country's Approach To COVID-19.
• Netherlands To Start Administering Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine Next Month After Likely EU Approval.
• Eastern Europe Faces Threat Of Air Pollution In Addition To COVID-19 Challenges.
• Experts Recommend Elderly, Nursing Home Staff And Residents, Medics Should Be First To Receive COVID-19 Vaccine In Germany.
• Large Swaths Of Southern England To Be Placed Under UK's Strictest Lockdown Measures.
• Macron In Quarantine After Testing Positive For COVID-19.
• Mexico's Government Floats Idea Of Purchasing Fewer COVID-19 Vaccine Doses From CanSino Biologics Than Previously Announced.
• Pfizer Facing Difficulty With Brazil Drug Regulator's COVID-19 Vaccine Requirements.
• Australian States, Territories Impose Border Restrictions As Sydney COVID-19 Cluster Increases.
• Second Coronavirus Wave Hits West, Central Africa As Weather Cools Down.
• Cargill Closing Ontario Beef Processing Plant Due To COVID-19 Outbreak Among Workers.
• All Brazilians Must Get COVID-19 Vaccine Or Else Lose Access To Public Spaces, Top Court Rules.
• Africa Not Likely To See COVID-19 Vaccine Campaigns Until April, Officials Warn.

HHS in the News

• Azar Wants "More Visibility" Into Pfizer's Manufacturing Process For Its COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Azar Informs HHS Staff That His Wife Has Tested Positive For COVID-19.
• HHS Allocating $24.5B To Providers Fighting COVID-19 Pandemic.
• Moderna Vaccine Set To Ship Amid Record Number Of COVID-19 Deaths.
• Uber Offering 10M Free, Discounted Rides In Effort To Boost COVID-19 Vaccinations.
• CMS Unveils New Initiative Which Aims To Improve Care Coordination For Dual Eligibles.
• Former FDA Chief Gottlieb Hails Rollback Of Frozen Cherry Pie Regulations.
• Congress To Begin Receiving Coronavirus Vaccinations In Coming Days.
• Giroir Urges Americans To Continue Taking Precautions Despite Authorization Of Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Analysis: Trump Fighting To Cling To Presidency, But Not Fighting COVID-19.
• Cognitive Impairment Could Complicate COVID-19 Vaccination Efforts In Long-Term Care Facilities.
• After Report On Trump Administration Influence On CDC Messaging, Question Of Commission Arises.
• CDC Estimates A Record 81,000 People Died From Drug Overdoses In 12-Month Period.
• First Doses Of Coronavirus Vaccine Administered In Native American Communities.
• Finding Way To Vaccinate Black Americans For COVID-19 Reportedly Is A "Conundrum."

• Panel Of Vaccination Experts To Discuss Who Should Receive COVID-19 Vaccine After Nursing Home Residents, Healthcare Workers.
• Scammers Attempting To Exploit COVID-19 Vaccine To Get People's Social Security Numbers, Officials Say.
• US Made Deal To Keep Temperature Monitoring System Active In Ultra-Cold Coolers For Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine.

National Front Page News

• Headlines From Today's Front Pages.

Last Laughs

• Late Night Political Humor.

National News

• Trump Reiterates His Intention To Veto NDAA.
• NYTimes Analysis: Trump Judges More Conservative Than Other GOP-Appointed Peers.
• Tuberville Could Join House Members In Effort To Contest Electoral Vote Count.
• Rice Defeats Ocasio-Cortez For Energy And Commerce Seat.
• Pence Campaigns For GOP Senate Candidates In Georgia.
• GOP Could Have Flipped House With Fewer Than 32,000 Votes In Key Districts.
• Biden Chooses Haaland For Interior Secretary.

NIH News

NIH's Collins Touts Scientific Collaboration That Led To Pfizer, Moderna COVID-19 Vaccines.

In an interview on CNN's Situation Room (12/17, 554K), NIH Director Francis Collins discusses the pending authorization of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine candidate, hailing the collaboration between NIH, pharmaceutical companies, and researchers "all working together, not worrying too much about who got the credit...and doing in 11 months what normally takes about 10 years."

Fauci Responds To Critics Of Christmas Message: 'You Don't Have To Cancel Things' But 'Be Careful'.

Fox News (12/17, Creitz, 23.99M) reports that White House coronavirus task force member Dr. Anthony Fauci "responded Thursday to critics who have claimed he wants to 'cancel Christmas' on account of the coronavirus pandemic." Fauci "told 'Bill Hemmer Reports' Thursday that he has never recommended that Americans completely scrap holiday gatherings, but rather exercise caution when it comes to who they get together with." Fauci said, "I'm not saying that everyone should cancel the family gathering, I'm saying that people will need to make individual choices."

Additional Sources. The New York Post (12/17, O'Neill, 7.45M) reports "Fauci said he's simply urging people to take caution when it comes to traveling, and to limit the size of holiday get-togethers." Fauci said, "You don't have to cancel things – you can still spend time with your family. I'm just asking people to be careful when it

comes to travel that may not be necessary, travel that you can avoid, and when you get together, try to make some limitation to it."

The Washington Times (12/17, Ernst, 626K) also reports.

Fauci Says He's Looking Forward To A Beer And Burger At A Restaurant When Pandemic Ends.

Fox News (12/17, Puhak, 23.99M) reports, "America's top infectious disease expert said he's most looking forward to ordering a beer and burger from a restaurant when the coronavirus pandemic comes to a close." Dr. Anthony Fauci "made the comments during a recent radio interview with L.A.-area DJ Maggie McKay of 94.7 The Wave, explaining that he and his wife Christine Grady haven't had a traditional sit-down meal at a restaurant since February." Instead, the director of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases "said he and his spouse have turned to takeout in a pinch."

10 Reasons Why Anthony Fauci Was Ready To Be The Face Of The US Pandemic Response.

The Conversation (12/17, 162K) publishes an article describing NIAID Director Anthony Fauci's CV and examining how his leadership and scholarship over the course of his career have prepared him to be the public face of the government's COVID-19 response.

Anthony Fauci Will Get An Honorary Degree From Bowdoin.

The Bangor (ME) Daily News (12/17, 178K) reports that NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, "who has been serving an infectious disease expert and White House adviser through much of the COVID-19 pandemic, will receive an honorary degree from Bowdoin this year." Fauci "has been serving an infectious disease expert and White House adviser through much of the COVID-19 pandemic."

New Cases, Hospitalizations Reach All-Time Highs In US.

ABC World News Tonight (12/17, story 2, 2:40, Muir, 7.31M) reported the preceding 24 hours were "the pandemic's deadliest day. More than 3,600 fatalities." ABC reports the CDC is "now predicting as many as 82,000 more deaths in the next three weeks. And California is now the nation's new epicenter. Nearly 150,000 cases just the past three days."

Additional Sources. The CBS Evening News (12/17, lead story, 4:10, O'Donnell, 4.49M) reported the "numbers are simply staggering: more than 3,600 Americans dead, 113,000 in hospitals, and nearly 250,000 people infected, and that's just in 24 hours," saying cases have "more than doubled...in two months, from 8.1 million on October 17 to more than 17 million tonight." NBC Nightly News (12/17, story 2, 2:30, Holt, 6.27M) reported Southern California "is on the brink of disaster, a region home to 23 million people and the country's second largest city, now reporting no open ICU beds."

Reuters (12/17, Heavey) reports the "unrelenting" spike in cases has "pushed hospitals further to their limits as the United States pressed on with its immunization rollout on Thursday and prepared to ship nearly 6 million doses of a new vaccine on the cusp of winning regulatory approval." Reuters reports hospitalizations have broken records for 19 days running, adding that COVID-19 "has claimed almost 308,000 lives in the United States to date, the most in the world."

Forbes (12/17, McEvoy, 10.33M) reports the US "has set a record for the highest number of coronavirus-linked deaths reported in a single day" three times this month, "adding an unprecedented 3,656 new victims to its growing toll on Wednesday." As the surge intensifies, "the U.S. has begun its rollout of the newly approved Pfizer and BioNTech coronavirus vaccine to the country's most vulnerable populations. However, it is not expected that the general population will start receiving doses until April, with top infectious diseases expert Dr. Anthony Fauci predicting that 'some level of normality' will come by fall if between 75% and 85% agree to take the vaccine."

Also reporting are The Hill (12/17, Coleman, 5.69M) and the New York Post (12/17, Fitz-Gibbon, 7.45M).

Illinois Spared COVID-19 'Surge,' But Deaths Still Mounting.

The AP (12/17, O'Connor) reports Illinois has avoided the worst of the "COVID-19 'surge upon a surge' that has struck some parts of the country in the aftermath of heavy travel and family congregations during the Thanksgiving holiday." Nevertheless, "Gov. J.B. Pritzker's administration on Thursday reported 181 additional deaths related to coronavirus illness and 8,828 newly confirmed infections." The article notes that after a surge in travel over Thanksgiving, "predictions of the surge upon a surge peppered warnings from Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert."

COVID-19 Vaccine 'Not A Silver Bullet,' Warns WHO.

Fox News (12/17, Farber, 23.99M) reports Takeshi Kasai, WHO's regional director for the Western Pacific, "this week warned that a COVID-19 vaccine is not necessarily a 'silver bullet' for ending the pandemic." Kasai said, "There is some light at the end of a long tunnel but these vaccines are not a silver bullet that will end the pandemic in the near future. ... This means that tired as we all are of this pandemic, we must stick to the actions and behaviors which protect not only ourselves but also those around us: hand washing, mask-wearing, physical distancing and avoiding places that have a high risk of transmission." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci "said on Monday that he expects the country to see herd immunity by late spring or early summer after coronavirus vaccines become more widely available."

Democrats Ask Of Biden's Health Team: Who's In Charge?

Politico (12/17, Cancryn, 6.73M) reports "Joe Biden vowed to assemble a world-class team capable of ending the pandemic and securing sweeping health care gains." However, "in the days since he rolled out his health leadership, Democrats have been occupied by a simpler challenge: figuring out who among Biden's health team is actually in charge." The article says, "Xavier Becerra, for instance, is in line to run the Health and Human Services Department at the center of the Covid-19 crisis – though he has little public health background. Jeff Zients, an economic policy expert, will coordinate the pandemic response out of the White House." Meanwhile, "Vivek Murthy, who spent three years as the Obama administration's surgeon general, is reprising his role at HHS – yet with the promise he'll also wield outsize influence in the West Wing." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Biden Warns That His Covid Aid Depends On Georgia Senate Victories For Warnock, Ossoff.

CNBC (12/17, Breuninger, 7.34M) reports "Joe Biden warned in a new ad that his plan to beat the coronavirus pandemic hinges on two Democrats winning a Georgia runoff that will determine which party controls the

Senate." As part of "a straight-to-camera appeal for Georgia voters to elect Democratic Senate hopefuls Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff," Biden said, "There are folks in Congress threatening to do everything in their power to block our efforts." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Biden Advisers Warn Trump Mass Vaccine Timeline May Be Too Optimistic.

NBC News (12/17, Pettypiece, Golden, Przybyla, 4.91M) reports, "Millions of Americans are watching with anticipation as the first coronavirus vaccines are administered, but doctors advising...Joe Biden are raising concerns that the timeline for widespread distribution may be longer than anticipated." The medical professionals who advise "Biden are warning internally that the program he will inherit from outgoing President Donald Trump may not live up to expectations of fast and widespread relief. Instead of mass distribution to the general population in the coming months, pandemic-fatigued Americans may find approval delays, distribution disruptions and insufficient quantities." Vaccinating every American who is interested "could take six months or longer, Dr. David Kessler, a former FDA commissioner who has been advising Biden, said in an interview Wednesday on MSNBC." The article mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Trump Is Conspicuously Absent From The List Of Public Figures Getting A Coronavirus Vaccine Soon.

Bill Bostock writes for Business Insider (12/17, 2.74M) that President Trump "is noticeably absent from the growing list of politicians, former presidents, and public figures setting a date to receive the coronavirus vaccine." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Additional Source. Summer Concepcion also covers the story for Talking Points Memo (12/17, 77K).

Americans Have Converted To Mask Culture, Survey Finds.

CNN (12/18, Kallingal, Fox, 89.21M) reports that according to a newly released KFF survey, "most Americans say they can keep up social distancing until the pandemic has eased or until there's a vaccine – and most think they'll need to." Such "fears may be justified. An ensemble forecast published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now projects there will be 357,000 to 391,000 coronavirus deaths in the US by January 9." The survey suggests these "fears may have motivated people to accept public health advice about wearing masks and staying away from other people." CNN notes that NIAID Director Anthony Fauci said in October that "wearing masks 'makes a difference' and that the politicization of masks should stop."

Covid And The Rebirth Of US Industrial Policy (Fauci Mention).

The Financial Times (12/18, Luce, Subscription Publication, 1.48M) reports, "Here are two words that could rapidly empty a Washington dinner party: industrial policy. Here are two that could get the guests back to the table..."

FDA Says It Will 'Rapidly Work Toward' Authorizing Moderna's COVID-19 Vaccine.

Charles Davis and Andrew Dunn write for Business Insider (12/17, 2.74M) that on Thursday, the FDA announced "it 'will rapidly work toward finalization and issuance of an emergency use authorization' of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine." This "news comes after an FDA expert advisory panel earlier in the day recommended that the vaccine be approved." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

F.D.A. Panel Endorses Moderna's Covid-19 Vaccine.

The New York Times (12/17, A1, Grady, Goodnough, Zimmer, Wu, 20.6M) reports "the coronavirus vaccine made by Moderna moved closer to authorization on Thursday, a significant step that would expand the reach of the nation's vaccination campaign to rural areas and many more hospitals." A panel of "experts recommended, by a vote of 20 in favor and one abstention, that the Food and Drug Administration authorize the Moderna vaccine for emergency use." The move "would clear the way for some 5.9 million doses to be shipped around the country starting this weekend." The decision is "expected on Friday." The Times adds that "Moderna developed its vaccine in collaboration with scientists from the National Institutes of Health."

Additional Sources. The Washington Post (12/17, A1, Johnson, McGinley, 10.52M) reports the FDA "said Thursday night that it will 'rapidly work toward' emergency authorization of Moderna's coronavirus vaccine, just hours after agency advisers endorsed the shot." The panel of advisers determined "the benefits of the highly effective vaccine outweighed its risks for people 18 years of age and older." The federal agency "intends to authorize the vaccine Friday, according to knowledgeable individuals." The agency "authorized the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine last Friday, hours after White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows warned FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn he would be asked to submit his resignation if the agency didn't authorize the shot by the end of that day."

USA Today (12/17, Weintraub, 12.7M) reports "the independent Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee voted 20-0 with one abstention to support mRNA-1273." Steven Pergam, a committee member and infectious disease and vaccine expert at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, said, "There's no doubt in my mind – it looks like the benefits outweigh the risks from what I've seen."

The AP (12/17, Perrone, Neergaard) reports Hahn "said late Thursday that his agency will move...quickly" to "authorize the second COVID-19 vaccine to fight the pandemic." He "said in a statement that regulators have communicated their plans to drugmaker Moderna." Once the "FDA's emergency use authorization is granted, Moderna will begin shipping millions of doses, earmarked for health workers and nursing home residents, to boost the largest vaccination effort in U.S. history."

NBC News (12/17, Edwards, 4.91M) reports Melinda Wharton, Director of the Immunization Services Division in the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the CDC, said, "Based on the totality of scientific evidence available, I strongly support it because the benefits outweigh its risks." Meanwhile, "Michael Kurilla, an infectious disease expert with the National Institutes of Health, was the sole member to abstain from the vote." Kurilla "said he felt the question on which the committee voted, 'Based on the totality of scientific evidence available, do the benefits of the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine outweigh its risks for use in individuals 18 years of age and older?' was too broad."

CNBC (12/17, Lovelace, 7.34M) reports that before "the vote, some members of the committee stressed that their endorsement for Moderna's vaccine was not for a full FDA approval, reiterating that the agency will still need to review more data on safety and effectiveness." Doran Fink, Deputy Director of FDA's division of vaccines and related products applications, said, "As we continue to investigate and evaluate the data, we will consider whether additional recommendations need to be made."

CNN (12/17, Watts, Christensen, Fox, 89.21M) reports Hahn and Peter Marks, director of the FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, said, "Following today's positive advisory committee meeting outcome regarding the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has informed the sponsor that

it will rapidly work toward finalization and issuance of an emergency use authorization. ... The agency has also notified the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Operation Warp Speed, so they can execute their plans for timely vaccine distribution."

Fox News (12/17, Farber, 23.99M) reports "a panel of independent experts advising the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently voted that health care workers and residents of long-term care facilities will be the first to receive the long-awaited coronavirus vaccine. That decision required approval from CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield."

The New York Post (12/17, Moore, 7.45M) reports "the Trump administration has secured nearly 6 million doses of Moderna's vaccine for immediate release, Heath and Human Services head Alex Azar said on Wednesday."

STAT (12/17, 262K) reports "Rachel Zhang, an FDA medical officer who is presenting the agency's analysis of the Moderna data to VRBPAC, reported that two people developed facial swelling after vaccination; both had a prior history of getting cosmetic injections of dermal fillers in their cheeks."

Among other news outlets reporting on the story are ABC World News Tonight (12/17, lead story, 4:20, Muir, 7.31M), NBC Nightly News (12/17, lead story, 2:50, Holt, 6.27M), the Wall Street Journal (12/17, A1, Burton, Loftus, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), Bloomberg (12/17, Edney, 3.57M), Reuters (12/17, Kalia), Fox Business (12/17, Barrabi, 3.06M), McClatchy (12/17, Camero, 29K), Forbes (12/17, Rosenbaum, 10.33M), Politico (12/17, Owermohle, 6.73M), NPR (12/17, Hensley, 3.69M), The Hill (12/17, Weixel, 5.69M), the Washington Times (12/17, Howell Jr., 626K), Vox (12/17, Irfan, 1.88M), the New York Daily News (12/17, Sommerfeldt, 2.51M), the Boston Herald (12/17, Cohan, 327K), the Daily Caller (12/17, Trunsky, 375K), the Atlanta Journal-Constitution (12/17, Lee, 1.46M), the San Francisco Chronicle (12/17, Ho, 2.44M), the Boston Business Journal (12/17, DeAngelis, Subscription Publication, 881K), National Review (12/17, Bernstein, 798K), Axios (12/17, Gonzalez, 1.26M), BioPharma Dive (12/17, Pagliarulo), FierceBiotech (12/17, Al Idrus, 4K), and the Financial Times (12/17, Stacey, Kuchler, Subscription Publication, 1.48M).

U.S. Cybersecurity Agency Warns Of "Grave Risk" After Hack.

Norah O'Donnell reported on the CBS Evening News (12/17, story 6, 2:00, 4.49M), "The US is under cyberattack as federal officials warn a likely Russian-based hack has penetrated deep into US national security infrastructure. The breach is widespread, and there are growing concerns tonight about what may come next." CBS' Catherine Herridge: "Hackers thought to be linked to Russian intelligence are now feared to be deep inside American infrastructure networks across the US government, and including the nation's top nuclear laboratory."

Additional Sources. Pierre Thomas said on ABC World News Tonight (12/17, story 6, 1:20, Muir, 7.31M), "Federal agencies scrambling, fearing enormous damage in what could be one of the largest cyberattacks in years." Pete Williams said on NBC Nightly News (12/17, story 7, 1:20, Holt, 6.27M), "A US security bulletin issued Thursday said [the cyberattack] poses a grave risk to the government and private sector, and said removing the infected computer code will be highly complex and challenging. The intrusion went undetected for nearly nine months, allowing the attackers to hunt for data in unclassified systems and read government emails." The AP (12/17, Fox) reports that the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency "said in its most detailed comments yet that the intrusion had compromised federal agencies as well as 'critical infrastructure' in a sophisticated attack that was hard to detect and will be difficult to undo." However, CISA "did

not say which agencies or infrastructure had been breached or what information taken in an attack that it previously said appeared to have begun in March."

The Washington Post (12/17, Timberg, 10.52M) says, "For days it has been clear that compromised software patches distributed by a Texas-based company, SolarWinds, were central to Russian efforts to gain access into U.S. government computer systems. But Thursday's alert...said evidence suggested there was other malware used to initiate what the alert described as 'a grave risk to the Federal Government and state, local, tribal, and territorial governments as well as critical infrastructure entities and other private sector organizations.'" The Post notes parenthetically that the National Institutes of Health was among the government agencies breached by the attack. The Hill (12/17, Beavers, 5.69M), NPR (12/15, 3.69M), and the Washington Examiner (12/17, Dyke, 888K) also mention the NIH in their coverage of the hack.

USA Today (12/17, Johnson, Bomey, 12.7M) says the bulletin "represented the most striking assessment yet of a cascading threat to federal, state and local networks."

The New York Times (12/17, Sanger, Perlroth, 20.6M) reports, "Echoing the government's warning, Microsoft said Thursday that it had identified 40 companies, government agencies and think tanks that the suspected Russian hackers, at a minimum, stole data from. Nearly half are private technology firms, Microsoft said, many of them cybersecurity firms, like FireEye, that are charged with securing vast sections of the public and private sector."

The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Volz, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports Senate Finance Chairman Charles Grassley and ranking member Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) on Thursday sent a letter to IRS Commissioner Rettig requesting a briefing, writing, "Given the extreme sensitivity of personal taxpayer information entrusted to the IRS, and the harm both to Americans' privacy and our national security that could result from the theft and exploitation of this data by our adversaries, it is imperative that we understand the extent to which the IRS may have been compromised."

In an appearance on Fox Business' After The Bell (12/17, 55K), White House Deputy Press Secretary Brian Morgenstern was asked about the hacking campaign that recently impacted FireEye and SolarWinds. Morgenstern said, "The Administration is very focused on this. We are aware of the reports and investigating. ... We have many professionals, of course, at Homeland Security and the National Security Council and at other various agencies very clued into this." Bloomberg (12/17, 3.57M) says President Trump "has yet to comment on the attacks." Roll Call (12/17, Ratnam, 130K), CNN (12/17, Liptak, 89.21M), Reuters (12/17, Menn), Axios (12/17, Knutson, 1.26M), Politico (12/17, Bertrand, 6.73M).

Underage Tobacco Use Falls Despite Cigarette Strength, CDC Finds.

Bloomberg (12/17, Clough, Kary, 3.57M) says, "The number of middle- and high-school students who use tobacco products fell 28% in 2020 to about 4.5 million, according to a new report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention using survey data collected from Jan. 16 to March 16." The agency pointed out that these "declines were driven largely by lower use of e-cigarettes, cigars and smokeless tobacco products."

Additional Sources. HealthDay (12/17, Mundell, 11K) reports, "The sharp decline in vaping rates was welcome news" and "suggests that recent moves by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to ban the most enticing, flavored varieties of e-cigarettes has had an effect." The article quotes CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield as saying, "The decline in tobacco product use over the past year is a win for public health. Yet, our work is far from done. Nearly 4.5 million U.S. youths still use tobacco products, putting a new generation at risk

for nicotine addiction and other health risks." The piece also quotes FDA Commissioner Dr. Stephen Hahn as saying, "We remain very concerned about the overall tobacco use rates for young people, including the nearly 3.6 million youth who currently use e-cigarettes. FDA will continue to monitor the marketplace, expand our public education efforts, and use our regulatory authority to further ensure all tobacco products, and e-cigarettes in particular, are not marketed to, sold to, or used by kids."

The Winston-Salem (NC) Journal (12/17, Craver, 226K) also reports on the analysis, and quotes Dr. Nora Volkow, director of National Institute on Drug Abuse, as saying, "The rapid rise of teen nicotine vaping in recent years has been unprecedented and deeply concerning since we know that nicotine is highly addictive and can be delivered at high doses by vaping devices, which may also contain other toxic chemicals that may be harmful when inhaled."

Current Use Of Tobacco Product Reported By 16.2% Of US Middle, High School Students. HealthDay (12/17, 11K) reports, "Current use of any tobacco product was reported by 16.2 percent of all U.S. middle and high school students in 2020, according to research published in the Dec. 18 issue of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report." Using data from the 2019 and 2020 National Youth Tobacco Surveys, "researchers found that current use of any tobacco product was reported by 16.2 percent (4.47 million) of all students in 2020, including 23.6 and 6.7 percent of high school and middle school students, respectively. The most commonly used tobacco product among high school and middle school students was electronic cigarettes (19.6 and 4.7 percent, respectively)." Meanwhile, "among high school and middle school students, there were decreases noted in current use of any tobacco product...from 2019 to 2020, resulting in about 1.73 million fewer youth tobacco product users."

Foreign Influence Threats Prompt Changes to NIH Conflict Rules.

Bloomberg Law (12/17, Baumann, Subscription Publication, 4K) reports from behind a paywall that under a pending change to the NIH's conflicts of interest policy, biomedical researchers would have to disclose ties to foreign collaborators.

Surgery, Drugs Similar For Treating Severe Diabetic Eye Disease.

HealthDay (12/17, Preidt, 11K) reports on research funded by the National Eye Institute finding that "surgery and injectable drugs are equally effective in treating" proliferative diabetic retinopathy (PDR). The study "included 205 patients with bleeding inside the eye due to" PDR, of which "100 patients received injections of the drug aflibercept (Eylea), and 105 had vitrectomy surgery and laser photocoagulation to remove blood from their eyes and prevent regrowth of blood vessels." At four weeks, "sharpness of vision (visual acuity) in the surgery group was significantly higher than in the patients treated with medication," but at 24 weeks, "visual acuity was the same in both groups." The findings were published in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Zones Of Immune Defence In The Liver.

Nature (12/17, Ray, 194K) reports, "new research from Anita Gola in the Germain laboratory at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, NIH, demonstrates that zonation in the liver extends to the immune cells, revealing that liver sinusoidal endothelial cells (LSECs) sense commensal bacteria to actively orchestrate localization of resident immune cells to promote host defence." The article quotes co-authors Gola and Ronald Germain saying, "Over the years, a wealth of imaging and functional studies have revealed that the complex

lymphoid tissue microanatomy acts in concert with soluble and membrane-bound guidance factors to enable efficient innate and adaptive immune responses. Yet despite the presence of many immune cell types in non-lymphoid tissues (such as the liver), similar detailed quantitative descriptions of immune spatial organization are largely lacking."

The Coming Vaccine Doesn't Mean We Should Delay Routine Care.

Pacific Research Institute president Sally Pipes writes for the Washington Examiner (12/17, 888K) that "postponing routine care" because of the pandemic "can have a very real and deadly cost." She writes, "UnitedHealth reports that its beneficiaries underwent nearly 1 million fewer mammograms, colorectal cancer, and cervical cancer screenings in the first eight months of 2020 than in the same period last year." Pipes concludes that "it's obviously important for people to reduce their risk of being exposed to the coronavirus by staying home when possible, keeping their distance from others, and wearing a mask. But it's also important for them to continue to get routine care. Postponing such care indefinitely is not cost-free. It can be deadly." The article mentions a recent statement form National Cancer Institute Director Ned Sharpless in which he said of delaying routine cancer screenings, "There's really almost no way that doesn't turn into increased mortality."

Living Through The Darkest Days And Longest Nights.

In a column in the New York Times (12/18, 20.6M), Timothy Egan writes about lessons about the coming winter during the COVID-19 crisis that can be learned from the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1805-06. The coming winter "could be 'the most difficult time in the public health history of this nation' as Robert Redfield, the head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said earlier this month." The expedition "fared well once they emerged from their long winter. We, on the other hand, face a brutal early spring. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation projects that more than 500,000 Americans likely will have died from Covid-19 by the end of March. Dr. Anthony Fauci has made similar grim assessments of what lies ahead; in November he predicted December would see 'a surge superimposed upon' a surge, not unlike the waves of the Pacific, gray and unrelenting in the December dusk."

Study Finds Survival Disparities And Mutational Differences For Black Patients Younger Than 60 With AML.

The ASCO Post (12/17, Cavallo) reports, "Bhavana Bhatnagar, DO, of The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center, Columbus, and colleagues investigated the outcomes of adults with acute myeloid leukemia (AML) and characterized molecular features of the leukemia cells in Black patients compared with White patients." Researchers "found that self-reported Black race was independently associated with poor survival of patients younger than age 60 diagnosed with AML."

GlaxoSmithKline, Vir Look To Succeed Where Lilly Failed With NIH Antibody Study In Hospitalized Covid-19 Patients.

Endpoints News (12/17, Blankenship) reports that in October, "the NIH quickly cut" Eli Lilly's "antibody from a trial in moderately ill hospitalized patients" with COVID-19, and now, "GlaxoSmithKline and partner Vir Biotechnology are hoping to succeed where" Eli Lilly "failed." Vir and GSK "will now take a shot at" hospitalized patients with COVID-19 "as part of a placebo-controlled subtrial in the NIH's 'master protocol' Activ-3." Initially, NIH will "test

GSK and Vir's candidate, dubbed VIR-7831, as well as an antibody combo from Brii Biosciences in an initial population of 450 moderately ill Covid-19 patients over the course of five days, the NIH said in a release."

Don't Fall For Big Pharma's Savior Act.

In an opinion piece for the New York Times (12/17, Buranyi, 20.6M), Stephen Buranyi, a visiting lecturer at the European Business School, writes that "a strange thing has happened in our celebration of" the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines: the vaccines "are being written...as a victory for pharmaceutical companies." Buranyi says "the rule in press coverage seems to be that the biggest brand involved gets top credit. ... There are stories about the Pfizer vaccine...the Moderna vaccine (a partnership between the National Institutes of Health and Moderna); and the AstraZeneca vaccine." Buranyi says "it's an incredible public relations coup for an industry desperate to rescue its image." Buranyi concludes, "The pharmaceutical industry wouldn't be able to rake in its profits and restore its reputation without funding that comes from our tax dollars. We shouldn't let Big Pharma forget it."

Without Resources, Vaccine Rollout Could 'Fall At The Last Hurdle,' Journalist Warns.

NPR (12/17, Gross, 3.69M) reports, "The fight against COVID-19 entered a new phase this week as American health care workers started getting vaccinated – the first in what will be a massive effort." Science writer Ed Yong of The Atlantic "says that the U.S. vaccination program will depend upon a public health structure that has been severely overburdened and underfunded." He points out "that the amount of money Congress allocated for vaccine distribution was 'minuscule' compared with the sum devoted to creating the vaccine." Yong also said that "when Congress awarded billions of research [dollars] to the [National Institutes of Health] to study COVID, none of that went down to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development."

Biden And Lawmakers Raise Alarms Over Cyber-Breach Amid Trump Silence.

The Washington Post (12/17, Gearan, Demirjian, Demirjian, Linskey, 10.52M) reports, "Democrats and some Republicans raised the alarm Thursday about a massive and growing cybersecurity breach that many experts blame on Russia, with...Joe Biden implicitly criticizing the Trump administration for allowing the hacking attack to occur." Biden stated, "We need to disrupt and deter our adversaries from undertaking significant cyber attacks in the first place. ... Our adversaries should know that, as president, I will not stand idly by in the face of cyber assaults on our nation." Meanwhile, President Trump "has said nothing about the hack affecting numerous federal agencies as well as U.S. companies." This breach impacted "the Department of Homeland Security, the State, Treasury and Commerce departments and the National Institutes of Health, officials have said."

Additional Source. Forbes (12/17, Solender, 10.33M) and Business Insider (12/17, Sheth, Lahut, 2.74M) also cover the story.

Health & Medical News

Sackler Family Members Denounced In Appearances Before House Panel.

The AP (12/17, Mulvihill) reports that on Thursday, "two of the owners of the company that makes OxyContin acknowledged to a congressional committee...that the powerful prescription painkiller has played a role in the national opioid crisis but stopped short of apologizing or admitting wrongdoing. 'I want to express my family's deep sadness about the opioid crisis,' David Sackler, a member of the family that owns Purdue Pharma, said at

a rare appearance in a public forum." David Sackler added, "OxyContin is a medicine that Purdue intended to help people, and it has helped, and continues to help, millions of Americans." Kathe Sackler, David Sackler's cousin, told the House Oversight Committee, "I have tried to figure out if there's anything I could have done differently knowing what I knew then, not what I know now. There is nothing I can find that I would have done differently."

Politico (12/17, Niedzwiadek, 6.73M) reports that the Sacklers' testimony "rang hollow to most committee members, who noted that the family benefited immensely from the billions in profits OxyContin generated for the company they owned. 'To the Sackler family and Purdue Pharma, let me make this clear as I can be: You all are bad actors,' Rep. James Comer (R-Ky.) said." According to Politico, Purdue, "more than any other, has been blamed for driving the nation's opioid epidemic with its aggressive promotion of OxyContin." However, "Thursday's hearing was the first time the drug manufacturer's representatives have testified under oath before Congress about Purdue's role in the ongoing crisis."

Reuters (12/17, Spector) reports that David and Kathe Sackler, "among several Sackler family members with ownership interests in Purdue, agreed to testify only after the committee's chairwoman, Democratic Representative Carolyn Maloney, threatened subpoenas." Rep. James Cooper (D-TN) is quoted as saying, "Watching you testify makes my blood boil. I'm not sure that I'm aware of any family in America that's more evil than yours." According to Reuters, Purdue "reaped more than $30 billion from opioid sales over the years that enriched Sackler family members, and it funneled illegal kickbacks to doctors and pharmacies, investigations have found."

Also reporting are The Hill (12/17, Hellmann, 5.69M), NBC Nightly News (12/17, story 6, 1:55, Holt, 6.27M) , the Washington Post (12/17, Kornfield, 10.52M), the New York Times (12/17, Hoffman, 20.6M), and the Financial Times (12/17, Kuchler, Subscription Publication, 1.48M).

Biogen Agrees To Pay $22 Million To Settle US Drug Charity Kickback Investigation.

Reuters (12/17, Raymond) reports, "Biogen Inc has agreed to pay $22 million to resolve U.S. allegations that it illegally used two charities that help cover Medicare patients' out-of-pocket drug costs as a means to pay them kickbacks to use its multiple sclerosis drugs."

US Labs Seeing Far Less Influenza Than In Past Years.

The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Abbott, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that the US is seeing far less influenza this year than in past years, and CDC influenza division director Daniel Jernigan credits efforts to combat COVID-19.

Over 370 International Spiritual Leaders Sign Joint Declaration Calling For End To LGBTQ Conversion Therapy.

The New York Times (12/16, Morales, 20.6M) reports, "In a show of unity aimed at fighting for the rights of L.G.B.T.Q. people, more than 370 international spiritual leaders have signed a declaration demanding a global ban on disputed conversion therapy." The joint "declaration also asked that nations find a way to end the criminalization of people based on their sexual orientation or gender identity," and "called for an end to violence against L.G.B.T.Q. people." The joint "pledge was signed by religious leaders from more than 35 countries," and

"was led by the Global Interfaith Commission on LGBT+ Lives initiative, in a bid 'to affirm the sanctity of life and dignity of all.'"

Pulse Oximeters May Be More Likely To Give Inaccurate Readings For Black People, Researchers Say.

The Hill (12/17, Budryk, 5.69M) reports, "A medical device that measures oxygen blood levels is more likely to give misleading or inaccurate results to Black patients, according to research published Thursday in the New England Journal of Medicine." Researchers "analyzed data from thousands of adult patients who received supplemental oxygen at the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor, comparing the data to that of 37,000 patients at about 200 other hospitals' intensive care units." The finger-worn pulse oximeter, "they found, was more likely to return inaccurate results for Black users based on comparisons of the data to a test that takes arterial blood samples."

Toxic Fumes Appear To Leak Into Airplane Air Supply More Frequently Than Previously Thought, Research Indicates.

The Los Angeles Times (12/17, 3.37M) reports that "for decades, the airline industry and its regulators have known about incidents of toxic gases from jet engine oil and other fluids leaking into the air supply on planes." But the Federal Aviation Administration "doesn't track these fume events. And airlines aren't required to report information needed to answer basic questions." The Times "turned to a database of safety reports voluntarily made to NASA by pilots and flight attendants" to help answer those questions. The Times' analysis "of NASA safety reports alone counted 362 fume events reported in 2018 and 2019, nearly 400 crew members or passengers who received medical attention and four dozen pilots who were described as impaired to the point of being unable to perform their duties."

The Los Angeles Times (12/17, 3.37M) reports separately. The Hill (12/17, Budryk, 5.69M) and The Verge (12/17, 1.54M) also provide coverage.

FDA Warns Consumers Not To Use Nearly 50 Male Enhancing, Weight Loss Products Sold Online.

Newsweek (12/17, 2.67M) reports that the FDA "is warning consumers to not use nearly 50 male enhancement or weight loss products sold on Amazon and eBay after the agency found hidden, dangerous ingredients in them." The agency "said all of the products purchased from Amazon and 80 percent of those purchased off eBay contained 'undeclared active pharmaceutical ingredients.'"

Hospitals Introducing AI Without Educating Employees About It.

STAT (12/17, Brodwin, 262K) reports hospitals are making increased use of artificial intelligence and their employees "are increasingly being asked to incorporate experimental AI systems into their workflows," and to do so "without a transparent explanation of how the tools work — or clear education on how to use them." As a result, "nurses and doctors...told STAT that the process has sowed confusion, frustration, and concern."

Former J&J Executive Files Sexual Discrimination And Harassment Suit.

STAT (12/17, Silverman, 262K) reports Gina Bilotti, "a 25-year veteran Johnson & Johnson (JNJ) executive, has accused the health care giant of persistent sexual discrimination and harassment," including a "ruthless pattern of retaliation." Bilotti alleges that the "highest levels of J&J management participated in and condoned the retaliation," including CEO Alex Gorsky.

Opinion: Congress Pursuing Contradictory Messaging In Approaches To Marijuana, Nicotine.

In a Washington Examiner (12/17, 888K) op-ed, Reason Foundation Director of Consumer Freedom Guy Bentley writes, "Congress is pursuing divergent and contradictory paths for nicotine and marijuana regulation. A majority of Republicans voted against" a measure that would have banned all flavored tobacco products, "while most Democrats did the reverse. The opposite was the case for the MORE Act," also known as the Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement Act. Bentley concludes, "Congress must work for safer, regulated markets for both nicotine and marijuana and avoid repeating the mistakes of the drug war with e-cigarettes, menthols, and smokeless tobacco."

Illinois Senator Praises Operation Warp Speed's Vaccine Rollout.

Fox News (12/17, Fordham, 23.99M) reports that Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL), "a top critic of President Trump, gave the administration praise as a second COVID-19 vaccine tied to Operation Warp Speed is expected to receive emergency use authorization from the FDA." Durbin said on the Senate floor Thursday: "Although I've been a frequent critic of this administration, I want to give them credit for organizing this effectively, and delivering a vaccine in a timely way, almost amazing timely way in this pandemic that we face." Earlier in the year, Durbin "cast doubt on Trump's efforts to ensure the development of a vaccine before 2021."

New Filings For Unemployment Rose To 885,000 Last Week, Data Show.

The Washington Post (12/17, Rosenberg, 10.52M) reports some "885,000 people applied for unemployment aid for the first time last week – a second consecutive week of increased claims, and a high not seen since the end of the summer, as negotiations for stimulus funding continue in Washington." Data also show "455,000 new claims for the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program for gig and self-employed workers." The article says approximately "20.6 million people were counted on the unemployment rolls as of the week ending Nov. 28, although officials say that number is inflated by duplicate claims and other issues stemming from backlogs in state unemployment systems."

The AP (12/17, Wiseman) reports that the number of Americans "who are receiving traditional state unemployment benefits fell to 5.5 million from 5.8 million. That figure is down sharply from its peak of nearly 23 million in May." This "means that some jobless Americans are finding jobs and no longer receiving aid." However, "it also indicates that many of the unemployed have used up their state benefits, which typically expire after six months."

The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Cambon, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) and Bloomberg (12/17, Pickert, 3.57M) also cover the story.

Trump Was Reportedly Pushing For Stimulus Checks For As Much As $2,000 Per Person.

The Washington Post (12/17, Stein, 10.52M) reports that on Thursday, White House aides prevented "President Trump from issuing a statement calling for substantially larger stimulus payments for millions of Americans, according to two people granted anonymity to share details of the private exchange." During "a phone call Thursday afternoon, Trump told allies that he believes stimulus payments in the next relief package should be 'at least' $1,200 per person and possibly as big as $2,000 per person, the officials said." Top lawmakers in Congress are "currently preparing a stimulus package that would provide checks of $600 per person."

Analysis: Lack Of State, Local Aid In COVID-19 Stimulus Package Will Likely Result In More Damage To The Economy.

The Washington Post (12/17, Hohmann, 10.52M) reports that "after nine months of dithering and deadlock, President Trump and Congress appear poised to enact desperately needed relief before leaving town for their Christmas vacations." The article says, "The $908 billion bipartisan proposal that was released earlier this week by a group of moderates would not have authorized another round of stimulus checks, but it would have included $160 billion in aid for states and cities who have seen tax revenue dry up amid the pandemic." The piece adds that the "failure to provide meaningful help for state and local governments will mean significant layoffs of public employees and reduce services at a time when there is growing demand for public assistance," which "will make the job picture bleaker and increase the pain for the neediest."

Analysis: Stimulus Checks In Next COVID-19 Stimulus Package Not Enough To Pay Average Month's Rent In Any State.

Newsweek (12/17, Cannon, 2.67M) reports there is growing speculation that "$600 stimulus checks could be included in the next COVID-19 relief package – however, that would not be enough to cover most people's rent." That "figure is said to be under consideration as lawmakers look to formulate a proposal able to pass both the House and Senate after a prolonged stalemate." But a "separate analysis of the latest American Community Survey from 2017 by Business Insider suggests the sum would not be enough to cover the average rent for an average American family of four in any state."

Commentary Examines GOP's, Dems' Motivations In Negotiating COVID-19 Stimulus Package.

Spencer Bokat-Lindell writes in the New York Times (12/17, 20.6M) that "eight months after Congress cut the first stimulus checks to help Americans absorb the shock of a pandemic-induced recession, it's finally making plans for a second round." Some contend Republicans want a smaller bill "because they want to saddle the Biden presidency with a halting recovery." In addition, because Senate Majority Leader Mitch "McConnell's newfound motivation to pass a bill appears linked to the Georgia runoffs," they say "Republicans will be much more resistant next year to economic relief if they retain control of the Senate." But others "blame Democrats for not taking the $1.8 trillion deal the White House offered in October, if only to weaponize Republican opposition to it before the election."

Commentary: McConnell May Be Undermining Biden By Omitting Aid For State, Local Governments From Stimulus Package.

Greg Sargent writes in the Washington Post (12/17, 10.52M) that "as congressional negotiators inch toward a deal on an economic rescue package, Republicans appear close to accomplishing one of their most cherished goals: keeping federal aid to state and local governments out of the deal." Sargent says "it's understandable that state and local aid has been put aside for now." Yet, "in getting this done, [Senate Majority Leader Mitch] McConnell may be doing more than it first appears to accomplish his apparent goal of undermining Joe Biden's presidency."

Commentary Says Dems Opposed Liability Shield In COVID-19 Stimulus Package Because "Personal Injury Lawyers Won't Allow It."

Marc A. Thiessen writes in the Washington Post (12/17, 10.52M) that amid negotiations on the COVID-19 stimulus package, "instead of compromising on liability reform, Democrats threw state and local governments under the bus. Last spring, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) drew a red line, declaring that Democrats would approve no more covid relief packages without aid to state and local governments. Republicans opposed the aid because they believed Democrats were using the pandemic as a pretext to bail out blue states for decades of high spending and fiscal mismanagement." Thiessen says in order to get what she wanted, Pelosi "would have to compromise on liability reform, and the personal injury lawyers won't allow it." He adds, "That is stunning. In all my many years in Washington, I've never seen a constituency with such total dominance over a political party. There are no votes at stake here; it's all about money."

Commentary Urges Congress To Pass COVID-19 Stimulus Package And Immediately Begin Work On The Next One.

Catherine Rampell writes in the Washington Post (12/17, 10.52M) that following "months of deadlock, lawmakers are inching toward a compromise on another round of fiscal relief. The deal reportedly includes more aid for the unemployed and small businesses and a second round of stimulus payments, among other measures, with a total price tag of about $900 billion." The agreement "couldn't come a moment too soon." Rampell says "it's great that leaders of both parties seem to (finally) recognize their duty to forestall the most immediate catastrophe, that post-Christmas benefit cliff." However, "their work isn't finished. Sometime in the next few weeks or months, lawmakers must take another bite at the apple before it rots."

LATimes: McConnell Most Likely Prodded By Partisan Interests To Negotiate On COVID-19 Relief Package.

The Los Angeles Times (12/17, 3.37M) writes in an editorial that some "eight months after Congress passed a massive coronavirus relief bill, lawmakers are closing in on a deal for a long-awaited follow-up: a roughly $900-billion package that would aid struggling small businesses, renters, workers and schools, while also pumping more money into fighting COVID-19." The Times says, "We'd like to believe that the looming end to extended unemployment benefits was enough to prod [Senate Majority Leader Mitch] McConnell into action." However, he was probably motivated by the fact that the two Georgia senators facing re-election have been criticized for opposing COVID-19 for consumers, and their defeat in the runoffs would mean "Republicans will lose control of the Senate."

California Rocked By Record Surge In COVID-19 Cases.

The Washington Post (12/17, Thebault, 10.52M) reports California has become "the new epicenter of the U.S. coronavirus crisis, with unprecedented surges of seriously infected patients threatening to overwhelm hospitals and overflow morgues." The state "has set nationwide records for new cases again and again in the past week," and if it "were a country, it would be among the world leaders in new coronavirus cases, ahead of India, Germany and Britain. ... California is also setting daily death records," and "the number of available beds in intensive care units is plummeting."

The Los Angeles Times (12/16, 3.37M) reports, "Single-day pandemic records were shattered across California yet again on Wednesday," with "more than 50,000 new coronavirus cases and nearly 400 deaths in California reported in a single day." The state "is now tallying an average of 203 COVID-19 deaths a day over a weekly period, and 35,200 cases a day – both records, and both quadruple the numbers from mid-November." From behind a paywall, Bloomberg (12/17, 3.57M) reports that Los Angeles has emerged as the US metro area most severely impacted by COVID-19.

The San Francisco Chronicle (12/18, Asmiov, 2.44M) reports as the state reported a surge in daily COVID-19 fatalities, "San Francisco imposed a 10-day quarantine on travelers arriving from outside the region. ... With the frightening trends Thursday came hope, however, as Bay Area hospitals vaccinated hundreds of health care workers, and the FDA's independent advisory panel said that another vaccine, by Moderna, should be approved for adults."

Analysis Of Virus Levels In California Sewage Points To Severity Of Current COVID-19 Surge. The Los Angeles Times (12/17, 3.37M) reports an analysis of virus levels in Silicon Valley sewage treatment plants "confirms that the latest wave of coronavirus infections is sharply worse than the ones in the spring and summer." Data show that "the levels of virus in recent weeks is far greater than seen in either of the prior two waves of the pandemic."

California Hospital Systems Strain Under COVID-19 Surge.

The Los Angeles Times (12/17, 3.37M) reports Southern California ICU bed capacity "hit 0% Thursday, and officials warned that conditions in hospitals are expected to erode further if the coronavirus continues to spread unchecked." Hospitals are engaging in emergency protocols "to ensure the sickest patients still get the highest levels of care possible during the crisis," but "eventually, there may be too many critically ill patients for the limited numbers of ICU doctors and nurses available, leading to greater chances of patients not getting the specialized care they need. And that can lead to increases in mortality."

The AP (12/17, Richer, Antczak) reports California hospitals "have all but run out of intensive care beds for COVID-19 patients, ambulances are backing up outside emergency rooms, and tents for triaging the sick are going up." While hospitals across the country are facing COVD-19-related challenges, "the crisis is deepening with alarming speed in California. ... Intensive care unit capacity is at less than 1% in many California counties, and morgue space is also running out, in what is increasingly resembling the disaster last spring in New York City." The New York Times (12/17, Wolfe, Smith, 20.6M) also reports.

Complaint: Hundreds Of Long Beach Police Gathered Maskless In Close Proximity At November Event.

The Washington Post (12/17, Peiser, 10.52M) reports, "Nearly 300 Long Beach, Calif., police officers, uniformed and masked, gathered close together for a group picture on Nov. 5." However, "an informal image from that

same day captured a different story – the officers are seen standing side-by-side and barefaced, the Long Beach Post first reported earlier this month." The department is now combatting "dozens of infections in its ranks," and "two Long Beach community groups are demanding an investigation and accusing the police chief of 'knowingly and willfully ordering a super spreader event.'"

Arizona Reports Nearly 6,000 New Cases Thursday.

The Arizona Republic (12/17, 1.05M) reports Arizona health officials "reported more than 5,800 new COVID-19 cases and 147 new known deaths on Thursday as hospitalizations for the disease" reached record levels. "The number of patients hospitalized statewide for known or suspected COVID-19 cases was at 3,884 on Wednesday a record high, up by 75 patients from the previous record of 3,809 set on Tuesday." The state's "average rate of new cases in the past week ranks among the highest in the nation, behind only Oklahoma, Tennessee and Rhode Island, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's COVID Data Tracker."

Analysis: COVID-19 Hitting US In Series Of Waves.

The Atlantic (12/17, Moser, 3.53M) reports that when the first COVID-19 surge began to abate in the spring, "public-health experts were already warning of a second surge." Through this paradigm, "the United States is in its third surge. Cases, hospitalizations, and deaths all peaked and then subsided first in April and again in August. When the current surge will peak is not yet clear."

COVID-19 Latest In Series Of Health Crises Faced By Marshall Islanders.

Politico (12/17, Diamond, 6.73M) reports on the outsized impact the COVID-19 crisis is having on Marshall Islanders living in the US, part of a diaspora of "thousands who fled the atolls in the Pacific after U.S. nuclear testing riddled the islands with radiation and rendered their communities unsafe. The islanders' experience during the pandemic has been a tragedy inside a tragedy, the culmination of decades-old U.S. policies and public health failures that continue to chase the Marshallese." In fact, an "outbreak in a Marshallese community in Arkansas was so bad, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this summer dispatched a team to specifically study it."

Rural Hospital Systems In Nevada Facing Strain From COVID-19 Cases.

The AP (12/17, Metz) reports Nevada "has more coronavirus hospitalizations per capita than any other state," describing "the overflow unit that one Reno hospital has set up in its parking garage to treat patients. But far from the state's population centers, rural hospitals...are also filling with patients." Rural hospitals have had to "convert sleep-study rooms into intensive care units and, at times, make wrenching decisions as capacity runs low and patient transfers turn increasingly difficult."

Utah Reports Record High 30 Daily COVID-19 Deaths Thursday.

The AP (12/17) reports health officials in Utah "reported 30 new deaths from the coronavirus Thursday, a new single day high that follows a monthlong surge in cases." This figure "eclipsed the previous high of 21 deaths reported Nov. 24, state figures show. A total of 1,126 people have died from COVID-19 since the pandemic began."

Nurses Say Rising COVID-19 Hospitalizations In New York Straining Staff.

The New York Times (12/17, Closson, 20.6M) reports on COVID-19 outbreaks among hospital staff and "nurses and other health care workers in the state have begun to warn about the conditions in hospitals, as virus patients are checking in at an alarming rate." On Wednesday, the Times adds, "more than 6,000 people were hospitalized and being treated for the virus." In the earlier outbreaks, "roughly 30,000 out-of-state nurses" helped, but in the current situation, Gov. Andrew "Cuomo and various hospital officials in New York have said they do not expect to be able to rely on them again." Meanwhile, "many nurses...say that their patient loads have now risen higher than in the spring."

COVID-19 Claims Lives Of Eight Wisconsin Nuns At Retirement Home.

The AP (12/17, Forliti, Gash, Crawford) reports over the past week, eight nuns living in a Milwaukee-area retirement home "died of COVID-19 complications in the last week – including four who passed away on the same day – a grim reminder of how quickly the virus can spread in congregate living situations, even when precautions are taken." The facility "had been free of the virus for the last nine months, but the congregation that runs the home found out on Thanksgiving Day that one of the roughly 100 sisters who live there had tested positive." Also reporting are The Hill (12/17, Budryk, 5.69M) and the New York Post (12/17, Lapin, 7.45M).

Louisiana Reports Significant Spike In COVID-19 Hospitalizations.

The AP (12/17, Deslatte) reports Louisiana COVID-19 hospitalizations have "reached heights exceeding the state's summer surge of the coronavirus disease, a sobering statistic that mutes some of the excitement surrounding this week's first virus vaccinations." State officials "reported 1,602 patients hospitalized across the state with the COVID-19 disease caused by the coronavirus as the state grapples with its third surge in cases since the pandemic began. More than 6,600 people in the state have died from COVID-19 since March, according to state data."

Nevada Health Officials Warn Improving COVID-19 Trends May Be Temporary.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal (12/17, 372K) reports the Nevada Health and Human Services Department "reported improvement Thursday in most of the major COVID-19 metrics it tracks, but state officials warned that the slowdown observed in recent days may be temporary." The state reported 2,281 new coronavirus cases, marking "the smallest gain in a week." However, "Caleb Cage, who directs the state's response to the pandemic, and Kyra Morgan, the chief state biostatistician, acknowledged that the positivity rate's decline was the longest since September, but said it's too soon to label it a trend."

DC Mayor Eases Christmas COVID-19 Restrictions Amid Lawsuit.

The Washington Post (12/17, Boorstein, 10.52M) reports Washington, DC, Mayor Muriel Bowser "issued a late-night order Wednesday modifying the city's rules on worship services and other activities" during the COVID-19 crisis. The Archdiocese of Washington has filed a lawsuit challenging the "rules prohibiting large gatherings – including Christmas services – during the coronavirus pandemic."

Florida Governor Faces Sharp Criticism Over COVID-19 Decisions.

CNN (12/17, 89.21M) reports, "Warning signs about a Covid-19 spike have been flashing red in Florida this fall," but "Floridians who rely on Gov. Ron DeSantis and his administration might hardly know the pandemic is still a serious danger." The state's health department hasn't issued significant public communications on the crisis, and Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) "has consistently downplayed the severity of the pandemic," blocking "local governments from enforcing their own measures to protect residents from coronavirus, and sidelined health experts even as he promoted questionable science, according to CNN interviews with more than a dozen Florida officials and experts."

Georgia Governor Says State Will Continue Paying For Extra Nursing Staff.

The AP (12/17) reports Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp (R) said Thursday that "Georgia will keep paying for extra nurses to assist hospitals, nursing homes and other health care facilities that have struggled to find staff and keep up with demand because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Republican governor" spoke "during a news conference at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta where Public Health Commissioner Kathleen Toomey and an intensive care unit nurse received a coronavirus vaccine in an attempt to demonstrate that it's safe and effective."

Report Details Lingering COVID-19 Risks To New York Nursing Homes.

The New York Post (12/17, Hogan, Lapin, 7.45M) reports according to a new report from the Empire Center for Public Policy, "New York's coronavirus-ravaged nursing homes are still 'acutely vulnerable'" to COVID-19. "Between Oct. 25 and Nov. 29, nursing home residents accounted for a quarter of all COVID-19 deaths statewide, despite making up less than half of 1 percent of the population, the Empire Center for Public Policy found."

As Vaccine Rollout Begins, California's Orange County Likely To Stay Locked Down For Another Month.

The Orange County (CA) Register (12/17, 594K) reports that as COVID-19 vaccine doses begin to be administered, "the virus's unchecked spread and nearly full hospitals mean restrictions and closures aren't likely to go away soon. Southern California is under a three-week stay home order, and 'we're in week two, but I'm not foreseeing that we'll be able to get out of the lockdown for (another) month at least,' Orange County Health Officer Dr. Clayton Chau said Thursday, Dec. 17."

Michigan House Votes To Limit Duration Of State Health Department's Emergency Powers.

The Detroit News (12/17, 1.16M) reports, "The Michigan House voted Thursday night to limit the emergency powers of the Department of Health and Human Services to 28 days, with any extensions requiring the approval of lawmakers." However, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer is likely to veto the measure. Whitmer's "own emergency powers were overturned by a Michigan Supreme Court ruling in October. After the ruling, Robert Gordon, the Department of Health and Human Services director, issued similar orders, from mask mandates to indoor dining closures, as epidemic orders under the public health code."

San Bernardino County Sues California Governor Over COVID-19 Restrictions.

The Los Angeles Times (12/17, 3.37M) reports San Bernardino County officials have "asked the California Supreme Court to overturn Gov. Gavin Newsom's stay-at-home order, alleging overreach under the state's emergency act." The county "said in a statement that Newsom has improperly acted as both the executive and legislative branch under the California Emergency Services Act since the pandemic hit nine months ago."

EMA Moves Forward Date Of Meeting To Assess Moderna's COVID-19 Vaccine.

Reuters (12/17, Shabong) reports the European Medicines Agency (EMA) "on Thursday set up an exceptional meeting for Jan. 6 to assess a marketing authorisation application for Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine." The EMA "had earlier planned to meet on Jan. 12 to review the application." The EMA said, "Today, ahead of schedule, (Moderna) has submitted the last outstanding data package needed for the assessment of the application. This contains information that is specific to the manufacturing of the vaccine for the EU market."

The AP (12/17) reports EMA Executive Director Emer Cooke said, "We have constantly revised our planning to further streamline all the procedural aspects that need to be in place for a robust scientific assessment that leads to a marketing authorization in all EU countries. ... The number of infections is increasing across Europe and we are aware of the huge responsibility we have to get a vaccine to the market as quickly as is feasible, whilst maintaining the robustness of our scientific review."

Russian COVID-19 Vaccine Receives Mixed Response.

The AP (12/17, Litvinova) reports "the Russian-made version" of the COVID-19 vaccine "has received a mixed response, with reports of empty Moscow clinics that offered the shot to health care workers and teachers -- the first members of the public designated to receive it." State-controlled media and Kremlin officials "touted the Sputnik V vaccine as a major achievement after it was approved Aug. 11." However, "among Russians, hope that the shot would reverse the course of the COVID-19 crisis has become mixed with wariness and skepticism, reflecting concerns about how it was rushed out while still in its late-stage testing to ensure its effectiveness and safety."

Putin Unsure About Taking COVID-19 Vaccine Due To Lack Of Testing In His Age Group.

The Hill (12/17, Choi, 5.69M) reports "Russian President Vladimir Putin, 68, said Thursday he is unsure about taking the coronavirus vaccine himself, citing the lack of testing done on those in his age group." He "made the remarks during a press conference, Bloomberg reports, as production of Russia's vaccine, Sputnik V, has been stalled due to lack of equipment." Putin said, "I'll do it as soon as it becomes possible."

Opinion: Legacies Of Tuskegee Syphilis Study, COVID-19 Remind Us To Listen To Patients Reluctant About Medical Treatment.

In an opinion piece for CNN (12/17, 89.21M), Tina Sacks, assistant professor at UC Berkeley's School of Social Welfare, writes that "many Black Americans have expressed reluctance to take the" COVID-19 "vaccine, a wariness some attribute to the enduring legacy of the egregious Tuskegee syphilis study." Sacks asserts that "the legacies of Tuskegee and Covid-19 are intertwined." For example, "both expose the depth of structural discrimination in the United States," and "remind us to listen and hear patients when they express distrust or reluctance about medical treatment." Sacks writes, "We must...ensure people are allowed to ask questions to make informed and uncoerced decisions about their health care."

Trusted Messengers Could Boost COVID-19 Vaccination Efforts Among Communities Hit Hard By COVID-19, Surveys Show.

Kaiser Health News (12/17, Eldred) reports public health officials "need to persuade people who are part of communities that have been hit hard by" COVID-19 "-- those in low-income families and some minority populations, especially Black and Latino residents -- to take a vaccine developed in less than a year and approved under emergency use authorization." Older Americans "said they would like recommendations from doctors, health officials, or family and friends -- people they trust, according to" a University of Michigan poll. Black people "are twice as likely to trust Black messengers versus white messengers," another survey showed.

Some Healthcare Workers, First Responders Reluctant To Take COVID-19 Vaccine.

Bloomberg (12/17, Singh, Goldman, LaVito, 3.57M) reports "some nurses and emergency-response workers have expressed reluctance to take the new coronavirus vaccine, a reflection of unease that U.S. officials hope to overcome as they ramp up the nationwide immunization effort." Public health officials "say people's concerns have eased...but this week's launch of vaccinations made it clear that some health-care workers and first responders remain unwilling to get the shot." Although "there are always vaccine detractors, hesitance among members of the medical community could deter the general public from getting it despite the safety record and more than 90% efficacy rate of the initial vaccines."

Commentary Urges Americans To Get Vaccinated Following FDA Panel's Recommendation To Grant EUA For Moderna's Vaccine.

In an opinion piece for Fox News (12/17, 23.99M), Sally Pipes, President, CEO, and Thomas W. Smith Fellow in Health Care Policy at the Pacific Research Institute, writes that "the vote Thursday by a U.S. Food and Drug Administration advisory panel to recommend an emergency use authorization for Moderna's coronavirus vaccine is an important and welcome step in our battle to end the COVID-19 pandemic." Pipes says it is "an indisputable scientific fact that vaccines are among the most effective – and safe – treatments ever devised by medical science. Widespread dissemination of COVID-19 vaccines is the fastest route to the pre-pandemic normal we all desire." Pipes concludes, "Americans need to set aside any misgivings they might have and get vaccinated."

J&J Has Fully Enrolled Participants For First Late-Stage Trial Of COVID-19 Vaccine.

Reuters (12/17, Francis) reports "Johnson & Johnson said on Thursday it has fully enrolled participants for the first late-stage trial of its COVID-19 single-dose vaccine candidate." The study "has enrolled about 45,000 participants and is being conducted by its unit Janssen, J&J said...in a statement, adding that it expects interim data from the trial by the end of January 2021."

BioNTech Chief Medical Officer Said Company's Choice To Move To Battling COVID-19 Happened Over Breakfast.

The AP (12/17, Jordans) reports "the doctor who led development of the first COVID-19 vaccine authorized in the United States, Britain and elsewhere said her company's decision to shift from cancer research to battling the coronavirus happened over breakfast as the possibility of a pandemic was starting to seem likely." BioNTech Chief Medical Officer Ozlem Tureci said, "I can remember the precise day, Jan. 24, when we made the decision

at the breakfast table." During "a video call with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other officials, Tureci recounted how her husband and business partner, Ugur Sahin, predicted that the outbreak...in the Chinese city of Wuhan had all the ingredients for a global pandemic." She said, "He alerted all of us and made us...pivot from cancer therapy to this program and divert our resources to developing a vaccine."

COVID-19 Vaccinations Arrive At Long-Term Care Facilities In Some States.

The New York Times (12/17, Robles, MacFarquhar, Jordan, 20.6M) reports "an early round of [COVID-19] vaccinations is getting underway this week" in long-term care facilities "in a handful of states." The first COVID-19 "vaccinations are starting just as conditions in long-term care facilities have deteriorated anew, with nearly 20,000 cases and an estimated 5,000 deaths per week, according to the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living." During interviews, "nursing home administrators said they were unsure whether the number of residents who agree to be inoculated would mirror the number in the general population, or whether firsthand experience of the tragic losses would make both residents and staff members more inclined to take the vaccine."

Government, Drugmakers Working Together To Create Network Of Detection Systems, Monitoring Devices Amid Vaccine Rollout.

TIME (12/17, Hennigan, Park, 18.1M) reports "shipping COVID-19 vaccine is a daunting challenge, not only because of the logistics involved in distributing millions of small glass vials to each corner of the country, but also because the doses must be kept frozen at far below normal freezer temperatures for the entire trip." In order "to ensure safe delivery, the U.S. government, drug makers and delivery companies have had to work together to develop a network of monitoring devices and detection systems." Every box comes "with a GPS beacon, a temperature monitor and a barcode that's scanned upon receipt. If the doses deviate from their target destination in each of the 41,689 U.S. zip codes, or if the vials get too hot or cold, officials at the companies and the government are immediately alerted to the problem." IHS is mentioned by TIME.

Rite Aid Teaming Up With CDC To Administer COVID-19 Vaccines.

Fox Business (12/17, Garber, 3.06M) reports "Rite Aid Corp. is partnering with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in helping administer COVID-19 vaccines." Rite Aid CEO Heyward Donigan said, "We have administered over one million COVID-19 tests and will be partnering with the CDC to help administer COVID-19 vaccines in our communities."

Some Americans Say They Plan To Wait To Get Coronavirus Vaccine; Experts Say That Is Not Necessary.

USA Today (12/17, Rodriguez, 12.7M) reports, "Beverly Askey doesn't want to get the COVID-19 vaccine right away," and many Americans "think like Askey." An ABC News/Ipsos poll "released Monday found more than eight in 10 Americans would receive the COVID-19 vaccine, but 44% said they would wait a bit before getting it." Experts "say that while it's understandable to be hesitant of a new vaccine, physicians...say patients don't need to wait."

COVID-19 Vaccines Reportedly Being Distributed Under "Unprecedented" Security Measures.

The Hill (12/17, Wilson, 5.69M) reports, "Hospitals and health care systems are taking unprecedented steps to safeguard" COVID-19 vaccines due to "concerns over security and the potential for black markets," as well as a requirement by Operation Warp Speed "to develop a security plan." There are "extra security personnel and constantly running cameras" in and around the "storage units, where the locks have been upgraded." Amid all this, "the United States is still grappling with ways to keep track of everyone who receives a vaccine."

Professors Call FDA's Staffing Of Review Of Pfizer/BioNTech Vaccine Inadequate.

In a piece for STAT (12/17, 262K), Peter Doshi, associate professor of pharmaceutical health services research at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy, and Matthew Herder, associate professor of pharmacology in the faculty of medicine at Dalhousie University, write, "In what is arguably the most important decision the" FDA "has made this year – its emergency use authorization of the Pfizer/BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine – the agency apparently assigned only a single reviewer in each of two key scientific disciplines...to do the work in three weeks that usually takes months to do." The authors find fault with this staffing decision, pointing out that "without additional reviewers it is hard to comprehend how the work of several months could be squeezed into a matter of 22 days (including Saturdays and Sundays)." In their view, "by assigning only one clinical, one statistical, and one toxicology scientist to review the...vaccine, it seems that discussion, let alone disagreement, was curtailed by design."

Confusion Reigns Over Issue Of Consent In Nursing Home Vaccinations.

The New York Times (12/17, 20.6M) reports, "There remains widespread confusion about a key element of the plan to protect some of the most vulnerable Americans against the coronavirus, report Rebecca Robbins and Jessica Silver-Greenberg for The New York Times: how nursing homes will get consent to vaccinate residents who aren't able to make their own medical decisions." Some states "are starting vaccinations in their nursing homes this week, but a broader nationwide effort will start in earnest on Monday as CVS and Walgreens employees begin to arrive at tens of thousands of nursing homes and assisted-living facilities to vaccinate staff and residents." A CVS executive "said such residents' legal representatives will be able to provide consent to nursing homes electronically or over the phone, but officials at multiple large nursing home chains said they were not aware of that."

Pfizer To Seek Approval Of COVID-19 Vaccine In Japan.

Reuters (12/17, Lies, Nadeem) reports that drugmaker Pfizer "will request for an approval of its COVID-19 vaccine in Japan on Friday, Kyodo News reported, citing sources familiar with the move." The Japanese government "has a supply deal with Pfizer for 120 million vaccine doses." The US and Britain "have already begun administering the vaccine made by Pfizer and German partner BioNTech."

SEC Sues Decision Diagnostics Corp For Allegedly Misleading Investors On COVID-19 Tests.

Reuters (12/17) reports that the SEC "sued Decision Diagnostics Corp and its chief executive for allegedly misleading investors by promising the biotechnology company could test for COVID-19 with a finger-prick of blood and provide accurate results in less than one minute."

Vice President Expected To Receive Coronavirus Vaccine On Camera Friday Morning.

The New York Times (12/17, Karni, 20.6M) reports, "At 8 a.m. on Friday, Vice President Mike Pence will roll up his sleeve to receive the coronavirus vaccine, a televised symbol of reassurance for vaccine skeptics worried about its dangers." Joe Biden "is scheduled to receive his injection on camera next week." However, "notably absent from any planned public proceedings is President Trump, who has said relatively little about the vaccine that may be seen as a singular achievement and has made it clear that he is not scheduled to take it himself."

The Daily Caller (12/17, Datoc, 375K) also reports.

Iowa To Get Fewer Vaccine Doses Than Promised, Moves Ahead With Relaxing Restrictions.

The AP (12/17) reports, "It's unclear why Iowa will receive fewer doses of coronavirus vaccine than initially promised by the federal government, but the state is moving ahead with plans to relax restrictions beginning Thursday even while reporting nearly 100 additional deaths." The Iowa Department of Public Health "released a statement Wednesday evening saying the state's allocation would be reduced by up to 30%." The agency "didn't explain why the allocation would be smaller, and state officials didn't respond to a question Thursday about the matter."

Michigan To Receive Fewer Doses Of Pfizer Vaccine Next Week Than State Received This Week, State Officials Say.

The Detroit News (12/17, Bouffard, 1.16M) reports, "Michigan's allotment of Pfizer Inc.'s COVID-19 vaccine will be smaller next week than this week's initial shipments, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services." The state "was told by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that it would initially receive 84,875 doses of the vaccine manufactured in the Kalamazoo area." State officials "learned in a phone call late Wednesday that the state will get 60,000 doses next week, said Lynn Sutfin, a spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services."

The Detroit Free Press (12/17, Baldas, 2.16M) also reports.

Oregon To Get Fewer Doses Of Pfizer Vaccine Than Planned Next Week, State Health Officials Say.

The AP (12/17) reports that Oregon "will receive fewer doses of the COVID-19 vaccine than expected next week, state health officials said." KOIN "reports that officials expected to receive 40,950 doses of the Pfizer vaccine next week from the federal government, but will now only receive 25,350 doses." Federal officials "have told other states to expect fewer doses...in next week's shipments as well."

Washington Governor Says State To Receive 40% Fewer Vaccine Doses Than Expected Next Week.

The AP (12/17) reports that Gov. Jay Inslee (D) "says Washington's allocation of the COVID-19 vaccine will be cut by 40% next week – and other states are also seeing reductions." In a tweet Thursday, Inslee "said the Centers for Disease Control told Washington about the reduced shipments." Inslee wrote, "This is disruptive and frustrating. We need accurate, predictable numbers to plan and ensure on-the-ground success. No explanation was given."

Texas Governor Vows "No More Shutdowns" As Hospitalizations Continue To Rise In State.

The Austin (TX) American Statesman (12/17, Cobler, Subscription Publication, 261K) reports that Gov. Greg Abbott (R) "again vowed Thursday he will not order new business closures as coronavirus hospitalizations continue to rise statewide, instead touting improved treatments and the arrival of the coronavirus vaccine in Texas." He said, "The fact of the matter is that it's time to put behind us shutdowns. No more shutdowns. We need to focus on opening up businesses." The governor's news conference, "his first in a month, comes days after the first vaccines arrived at health care facilities in Austin, Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas."

The AP (12/17) reports Abbott said that "more than 1 million Texans are expected to be vaccinated for COVID-19 by the end of the month as part of the largest vaccination campaign in U.S. history." Texas "had received about 95,000 doses of Pfizer's vaccine through Wednesday with another 129,000 doses to be delivered Thursday, Abbott said."

KHOU-TV Houston (12/17, Alexander, 340K) also reports.

Tennessee Governor Touts Vaccine Distribution, But Says Residents Need To Remain Vigilant.

CNN (12/17, Burnside, 89.21M) reports, "As the state prepares to administer its first shipment of Covid-19 vaccines, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee is urging all residents to be vigilant and to continue acting responsibly during this pandemic." While the authorization of vaccines "is a turning point in this pandemic, the sobering reality is that Tennesseans are getting sicker, Lee told reporters Thursday." Decisions people "made over the Thanksgiving holiday [are] having a severe reality on the hospital system across the state, Lee said."

Juneau Extends Mask Requirement For At Least Six More Months.

The AP (12/17) reports, "A mask mandate in Juneau has been extended for at least six more months." The ordinance "passed by the City and Borough of Juneau Assembly on Monday upholds the requirement for masks to be worn in all indoor public settings and outdoors when within six feet (1.8 meters) of other people." Alaska "is one of 12 states as of Wednesday without a statewide mask mandate."

Opinion: States Need To Deliver Coronavirus Vaccine To At-Risk Elders Living At Home.

In an article for Forbes (12/17, 10.33M), contributor Howard Gleckman writes, "The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has put residents and staff of nursing homes and assisted living facilities near the top of the list for receiving a covid-19 vaccine. That is the right call. But public health officials should not forget about the millions of frail older adults living at home who are at risk of dying from covid-19. And as it stands today, they may have to wait months for the vaccine. That delay could result in many needless deaths." Gleckman writes, "It likely will be summer before vaccines are widely available, so the states will have to ration. But as they do, they

should remember the millions of people who are at high risk of severe illness or death from the virus, but who are living at home."

Tennessee Only State To Set Aside Portion Of Coronavirus Vaccine Shipment As Reserve.

The AP (12/17, Kruesi) reports, "As states rush to inoculate health care workers on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic, only Tennessee has prioritized building its own emergency reserve of the coveted vaccine." An Associated Press "review of each state's COVID-19 vaccine distribution plans shows that Tennessee alone has specified it will hold back a small portion in 'case of spoilage of vaccine shipped to facilities.'" The state's "initial shipment of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine that arrived Monday was not distributed for inoculation, so health care workers had to wait until the second shipment arrived days later."

Oklahoma Governor Moves Teachers Higher On Priority List For Coronavirus Vaccine.

The AP (12/17) reports that school teachers in Oklahoma "have been moved to a higher priority on the list of those eligible to receive the coronavirus vaccine, Gov. Kevin Stitt said Thursday." Stitt said, "I've directed the state department of health to move K-12 teachers and support staff who interact with students up to phase two of our vaccine distribution plan." Stitt "said the change helps accomplish his goal of returning all of the state's schools to in-person classes in January, following the Christmas holiday break."

Memphis Physician Warns Tennessee Is One Of Worst Regions For COVID-19 Transmission.

Newsweek (12/17, Smith, 2.67M) reports that the state of Tennessee "is one of the worst regions nationwide for COVID transmission, an infectious disease specialist in Memphis has warned." Dr. Steve Threlkeld, "who works at the Baptist Hospital in the city, has said cases of coronavirus will continue to rise if no changes are made, putting intense pressure on hospital services." Tennessee "ranked second for daily cases per 100,000 people over the past week, according to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Wednesday."

DC Healthcare Workers, First Responders Get Coronavirus Vaccine.

The Washington Times (12/17, Zantow, 626K) reports that District of Columbia officials "highlighted the city's coronavirus vaccination program Thursday by publicly inoculating front-line first responders and health care workers at Kaiser Permanente Capitol Hill Medical Center." Dr. LaQuandra Nesbitt, "director of the D.C. Department of Health, was the first to receive the shot, followed by six others including a nurse, two doctors and members of the Fire and EMS Department."

Colorado Unveils Program Giving Restaurants, Other Businesses Way To Loosen Vaccine Restrictions.

The Denver Post (12/17, Nicholson, 660K) reports that Colorado public health officials this week "unveiled a new program to let participating counties offer restaurants and other businesses a path to expand their capacities beyond the limits set by their county's color level on the COVID-19 restriction dial." The "new 5 Star State Certification Program 'requires businesses certified through the program to implement safety measures beyond what is already required by public health orders and guidelines,' according to a Colorado Department of Public

Health and Environment news release." Officials said, "Depending on the county's level and metrics, certified businesses may be eligible for less-restrictive capacity caps."

San Francisco To Mandate Quarantine For Anyone Arriving From Outside Bay Area.

Fox News (12/17, Farber, 23.99M) reports, "A surge in cases of the novel coronavirus prompted San Francisco officials on Thursday to mandate that anyone traveling to the city from outside the Bay Area...quarantine for a period of time." The 10-day quarantine "will apply to anyone 'traveling, moving, or returning to San Francisco from anywhere outside the Bay Area,' according to city officials."

The San Francisco Chronicle (12/17, Allday, 2.44M) and the Los Angeles Times (12/17, Dolan, 3.37M) also report.

Judge Rules New York City Mayor Must Hand Over Documents Related To Handling Of Pandemic.

The New York Post (12/17, Campanile, 7.45M) reports that New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio (D) "must comply with a probe into the city's response to the coronavirus pandemic, a judge ruled Thursday." Manhattan state Supreme Court Justice Lyle Frank "said Comptroller and 2021 mayoral candidate Scott Stringer has broad authority under the law to request documents and compel testimony from City Hall and agencies to analyze the city's handling of the pandemic." Stringer "filed the lawsuit after accusing City Hall of stonewalling over documents, including requests via subpoena, related to his investigation."

Maryland Governor Orders Those Traveling To, From State To Test Negative For COVID-19 Or Quarantine.

The Hill (12/17, 5.69M) reports that Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan (R) "is requiring residents who travel out of state to get tested for COVID-19 or quarantine." Hogan "announced an emergency order during a press conference Thursday, which limits travel for essential purposes." Those "who do travel to and from the state have to obtain a negative COVID-19 test result or self-quarantine for 10 days."

The AP (12/17, Witte) reports Hogan "urged state residents to stay home for the holidays to help stop the spread of COVID-19, and also announced a new $180 million relief package to help businesses and people affected by the pandemic."

The Washington Post (12/17, Schneider, Wiggins, Zauzmer, 10.52M), the Washington Times (12/17, Zantow, 626K), and the Baltimore Sun (12/17, Knezevich, 629K) also report.

Study: Pandemic Restrictions Cost 500,000 California Workers Their Jobs.

The Orange County (CA) Register (12/17, Lansner, 594K) reports, "A Chapman University study says California would have had roughly one-third fewer job losses this year if its pandemic restrictions had been more accommodating to the business community." The study "also says the state's strict business limitation saved 6,600 lives." Chapman's researchers "found the state mandates designed to curb the coronavirus cost 500,000 more workers their jobs."

Nevada Official Tells Panel State Expects To See New COVID-19 Surge Over Holidays.

The AP (12/17) reports, "With deaths and hospitalizations attributed to the spread of COVID-19 during Thanksgiving gatherings appearing to level off in Nevada, officials said Thursday they expect new surges in reported cases following the Christmas and New Year's holidays." Kyra Morgan, "chief state biostatistician, told the COVID-19 Mitigation and Management Task Force during a weekly update: 'It's a little bit too early to conclude that we're approaching any kind of a plateau. As Christmas approaches and New Year's approaches we do anticipate...significant impact on our cases.'"

Some Wyoming Bars Are Ignoring Statewide Mandate To Close Earlier.

The AP (12/17) reports that some bars in northwestern Wyoming "are defying a statewide public health order to close earlier than usual to discourage spread of the coronavirus." Public health orders "announced by Gov. Mark Gordon on Dec. 7 require bars and restaurants to close from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. through at least Jan. 8." The goal "is to discourage people from gathering in situations that make virus spread more likely while stopping short of closing bars and restaurants completely."

California Panel Discusses Putting First Responders, Teachers, Farmworkers Next In Line For Vaccine.

The Los Angeles Times (12/17, Money, Lin, 3.37M) reports that California's "first responders, farmworkers and educators would be among those next in line to be vaccinated against COVID-19 under recommendations that a state advisory committee discussed this week." Should that guidance "eventually be put into effect, those workers – as well as others in the broadly defined fields of education and childcare, emergency services, and food and agriculture – would be prioritized within the second major stage of the state's wider vaccination push." Though California's vaccine rollout "plans continue to be defined, Wednesday's meeting of the state Community Vaccine Advisory Committee provided a window into how the process may play out in the weeks to come."

Michigan Lawmakers Reinstate Moratorium On Water Shutoffs Through March.

The AP (12/17, Eggert) reports that Michigan lawmakers "voted Thursday to prohibit water shutoffs across the state through March, reinstating a moratorium that was upended by a court ruling." The bill, "which received final approval 96-9 in the House, will be signed by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer." It "was among a number of pandemic-related measures approved by legislators as they worked to conclude their work before adjourning for the year."

MLive (MI) (12/17, Dodge, 828K) reports the Senate bill "would also require public water suppliers to strive to determine which households lack water service and make best efforts to restore it."

The Hill (12/17, Bowden, 5.69M) also reports.

Supreme Court Denies Christian School's Request To Be Exempt From School Closures Amid Pandemic.

The Washington Post (12/17, Barnes, 10.52M) reports that the Supreme Court on Thursday "denied a Kentucky Christian academy's plea that it should be exempt from the governor's order requiring all K-12 institutions to temporarily cease in-person classes because of rising coronavirus cases." Danville Christian Academy, "joined by Kentucky's attorney general, said it should not be compared to other schools, but to businesses that have been allowed to remain open with reduced capacities, and doing otherwise was a violation of religious rights."

But the court, "in an unsigned order, noted that schools are about to begin their holiday breaks, and Gov. Andy Beshear's mandate expires before schools reopen Jan. 4."

The New York Times (12/17, Liptak, 20.6M) reports the court's brief "added that the challengers had not squarely confronted an important distinction. 'The order applies equally to secular schools and religious schools, but the applicants argue that the order treats schools (including religious schools) worse than restaurants, bars and gyms, for example, which remain open,' the opinion said." The opinion continued, "Under all of the circumstances, especially the timing and the impending expiration of the order...we deny the application without prejudice to the applicants or other parties seeking a new preliminary injunction if the governor issues a school-closing order that applies in the new year."

The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Bravin, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) and USA Today (12/17, Wolf, 12.7M) also report.

Global Health News

Spain's Parliament Approves Bill To Allow Physician-Assisted Suicide For Long-Suffering Patients Of Incurable Diseases.

The AP (12/17) reports, "Spain's parliament voted Thursday to approve a bill that will allow physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia for long-suffering patients of incurable diseases or unbearable permanent conditions." The bill now moves to "the Senate where it is also expected to pass." Based on the language "of the law approved by the lower house, it won't go into effect until three months after being published in the government gazette."

Opinion: Family Planning, Basic Health Services Investments Needed To Prevent Maternal Deaths Around Globe.

In an op-ed for the Los Angeles Times (12/17, Lomborg, 3.37M), Bjorn Lomborg, president of the Copenhagen Consensus and a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, argues that his group's "new research uses cost-benefit analysis to determine which policies would be most cost-effective at preventing maternal and newborn death during childbirth." Two such "interventions stood out as the best investments for new spending," namely, "family planning and what is known as basic emergency obstetric and newborn care."

UN Secretary-General Warns Against "Vaccinationalism" Amid Pandemic.

The Hill (12/17, Williams, 5.69M) reports "U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres warned against 'vaccinationalism' on Thursday as countries race to inoculate their populations against COVID-19." He "made the remark at a joint press conference with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, as he was discussing the World Health Organization's COVAX program, which aims to deliver coronavirus vaccines to developing countries." Guterres said, "It is not with vaccinationalism that we are going to defeat COVID-19. ... It is with international cooperation."

Oxford's COVID-19 Vaccine Has Strong Immune Response Under Two Full-Dose Regime, Early Trials Find.

Reuters (12/17, Smout, Weir) reports "Oxford University's COVID-19 vaccine candidate has a better immune response when a two full-dose regime is used rather than a full-dose followed by a half-dose booster, the university said on Thursday, citing data from early trials." The vaccine developers "have already published later stage trial results showing higher efficacy when a half dose is followed by a full dose, compared to a two full-dose regime." The new "details from the Phase I and 2 clinical trials released on Thursday made no reference to the half-dose/full-dose regime, which Oxford has said had been 'unplanned' but approved by regulators."

EU Plans To Begin Administering COVID-19 Vaccines As Early As December 27.

The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Hinshaw, Kalin, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports the EU plans to begin administering COVID-19 vaccines as early as December 27, just days after its expected decision on authorization of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

New Zealand Offers Neighboring Nations Free COVID-19 Vaccines.

The Hill (12/17, Deese, 5.69M) reports New Zealand "announced Thursday that it would provide free COVID-19 vaccines to its population of 5 million, plus additional free vaccines to neighboring nations." The announcement "came as government officials also said the country had purchased vaccines from two major developers, AstraZeneca and Novavax, NPR reported." New Zealand "said it would support sending free vaccines to Tokelau, Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu if they request them."

Germany Faces Worsening Coronavirus Situation Each Week.

The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that in Germany daily coronavirus infections and deaths are exceeding records every week which is increasing pressure on the country's health system and forcing government leaders to impose a harder lockdown.

Sweden's King Criticizes Country's Approach To COVID-19.

Bloomberg (12/17, Daly, Lindeberg, Rolander, 3.57M) reports that Sweden's monarch King Carl XVI Gustaf said the country's COVID-19 approach has failed, laying the blame on "the chief architect of Sweden's strategy, Anders Tegnell, its state epidemiologist." Similarly, "Prime Minister Stefan Lofven also voiced his displeasure." He said, "The King observes, as we and many others have, that the fact that so many people have died cannot be seen as anything else than a failure." Still, "Tegnell has continued to defend Sweden's overall strategy of avoiding lockdowns." Tegnell "also argues that there's no real evidence that face masks work, and Swedes are among the only people left going about their daily lives largely mask-free, with shops, restaurants and gyms all still open."

Also reporting are the AP (12/17, Olsen), The Hill (12/17, 5.69M), and Newsweek (12/17, 2.67M).

Netherlands To Start Administering Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine Next Month After Likely EU Approval.

The AP (12/17) reports, "The Dutch health minister said Thursday that coronavirus vaccinations using the Pfizer-BioNTech shots will start Jan. 8 if the European Union's medicines agency approves it for use next week."

Eastern Europe Faces Threat Of Air Pollution In Addition To COVID-19 Challenges.

The AP (12/17, Emric) reports, "With the arrival of cold and foggy winter weather amid the pandemic, eastern Europe is facing an extra respiratory health hazard – air pollution." The UN "has warned in previous years that people in all major cities across the Western Balkans face alarming levels of air pollution that are reducing their life expectancies," but "this year, the problem is coupled with the soaring COVID-19 infections."

Experts Recommend Elderly, Nursing Home Staff And Residents, Medics Should Be First To Receive COVID-19 Vaccine In Germany.

The AP (12/17, Jordans) reports, "An independent expert team on Thursday recommended that people over age 80, residents and staff in nursing homes, and medics at high risk of exposing themselves or others to COVID-19 should be the first in Germany to get the coronavirus vaccine." This "recommendation, which is likely to form the basis of an official decree Friday, comes as Germany grapples with a growing number of new cases and deaths from the coronavirus."

Large Swaths Of Southern England To Be Placed Under UK's Strictest Lockdown Measures.

The AP (12/17, Hui) reports, "Large parts of southern England will be placed under the country's strictest coronavirus restrictions from this weekend, Britain's health secretary said Thursday, as infections and hospital admissions continue to surge in those areas."

Reuters (12/17, James, Piper) also reports.

Macron In Quarantine After Testing Positive For COVID-19.

Reuters (12/17, Pineau) reports that French President Emmanuel Macron "tested positive for the coronavirus on Thursday, prompting a track-and-trace effort across Europe following numerous meetings between the French leader and EU heads of government in recent days." According to Reuters, "An Elysee official described Macron as tired and having a cough, and said that it was not excluded that he be moved to a presidential retreat close to the Palace of Versailles to rest." Reuters says Macron "will cancel all upcoming trips including a Dec. 22 visit to Lebanon where he has led international efforts to resolve a deep-rooted political crisis."

The AP (12/17) reports that "the French and Spanish prime ministers and the EU Council president were among many top officials self-isolating because they had recent contact with" Macron. The AP adds that Macron's wife, Brigitte, 67, "tested negative on Thursday. She has no symptoms and will self-isolate as a precaution, her office said." The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Bisserbe, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), the Washington Post (12/17, Birnbaum, 10.52M), and Politico Europe (12/17, 15K) provide details on Macron's diagnosis.

Mexico's Government Floats Idea Of Purchasing Fewer COVID-19 Vaccine Doses From CanSino Biologics Than Previously Announced.

Reuters (12/17, Cortes Fernandez, Barrera, Garrison) reports that "the Mexican government on Thursday floated the possibility that it will purchase far fewer COVID-19 vaccine doses from CanSino Biologics Inc than the 35 million doses announced last week by the country's foreign minister." Mexico's "Deputy Health Minister Hugo Lopez-Gatell, the government's most prominent pandemic-response official, told W Radio that the amount of vaccines Mexico aims to buy from Chinese drugmaker CanSino is between 10 million and 35 million doses." He

"also noted that the government is close to signing a separate vaccine contract with Johnson & Johnson's Janssen unit for a potential 22 million doses."

Pfizer Facing Difficulty With Brazil Drug Regulator's COVID-19 Vaccine Requirements.

Reuters (12/17, Fonseca) reports, "Pfizer is encountering difficulty in registering its COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use in Brazil due to the level of detail required by the regulator, Health Minister Eduardo Pazuello said on Thursday." Pazuello's "comments could raise tensions with Pfizer, whose vaccine is already being used in Britain and the United States." The comments "will also fuel concerns from critics who argue that Brazil's vaccine rollout is progressing too slowly, just as the virus roars back to life."

Australian States, Territories Impose Border Restrictions As Sydney COVID-19 Cluster Increases.

Reuters (12/17, Packham, Jose) reports, "Australian states and territories on Friday begun imposing border restrictions after 28 COVID-19 cases were detected from a cluster on Sydney's northern beaches, with fears the number of infections will rise."

Second Coronavirus Wave Hits West, Central Africa As Weather Cools Down.

Reuters (12/17, Lorgerie, McAllister) reports, "A second wave of coronavirus infections is hitting West and Central Africa, and experts are warning it could be worse than the first as cooler weather descends on a region where most countries cannot afford a vaccine."

Cargill Closing Ontario Beef Processing Plant Due To COVID-19 Outbreak Among Workers.

Reuters (12/17, Nickel) reports, "Cargill Inc will begin to temporarily close its Guelph, Ontario beef processing plant on Thursday because of an outbreak of COVID-19 infections among workers, the company and a public health organization said."

All Brazilians Must Get COVID-19 Vaccine Or Else Lose Access To Public Spaces, Top Court Rules.

Bloomberg (12/17, Preissler Iglesias, 3.57M) reports, "All Brazilians are required to be vaccinated against Covid-19 under the penalty of being banned from certain public activities and spaces, the country's top court has decided." Altogether, 10 "justices of the 11-member court backed the mandatory inoculation with only one vote against in a virtual session held Thursday." The decision "is a blow to President Jair Bolsonaro, who has said he won't get a vaccine and nobody should be forced to."

Africa Not Likely To See COVID-19 Vaccine Campaigns Until April, Officials Warn.

The Washington Post (12/16, Paquette, Bearak, 10.52M) reports that COVID-19 vaccine "distribution campaigns across Africa are not likely to begin until April, the head of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated." Even at that time, "far fewer doses will be sent to African countries than are being shipped to the United States and Europe." It seems that "most of Africa's 54 nations stand to benefit from the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Assess Facility, or COVAX, the World Health Organization-backed program set to divide a billion doses across 92 low- and middle-income countries next year." However, "$5 billion more is needed to

cover vulnerable residents in target nations by the end of 2021, according to Gavi, the alliance raising funds for Covax."

Reuters (12/17, Mohammed) also reports.

HHS in the News

Azar Wants "More Visibility" Into Pfizer's Manufacturing Process For Its COVID-19 Vaccine.

CNBC (12/17, Lovelace, 7.34M) reports that on Thursday, HHS Secretary Alex Azar said "he'd like 'more visibility' into the manufacturing of Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine, adding the U.S. drugmaker has kept the federal government at 'arm's length' throughout the process." Contrary to "other drugmakers, Pfizer did not accept federal funding to help develop or manufacture its vaccine." The company "has a deal with the U.S. to supply 100 million doses of its vaccine as part of Operation Warp Speed." Azar stated, "'They are part of Operation Warp Speed, but...it's a different relationship' from the government's deals with Moderna and other pharmaceutical companies that took federal funding." He added, "We contract, give [Pfizer] a guaranteed purchase, that allows them to make capital investments, have a predictable purchaser, but we don't have complete visibility into their manufacturing because they have kept that a bit more arm's length."

Fox News (12/17, Rivas, 23.99M) reports that Azar outlined "some 'hiccups' that have cropped up during distribution of Pfizer's recently approved COVID-19 vaccine." He "reiterated comments that the complexity with Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine does not lie in the subfreezing storage requirements." Azar "said hospitals are well equipped to manage the storage requirements to keep up with the vaccines' cold chain."

CNBC's Squawk Box (12/17, 104K) carried the interview. Reuters (12/17, Heavey) also covers the story.

Azar Informs HHS Staff That His Wife Has Tested Positive For COVID-19.

Politico (12/17, Diamond, 6.73M) reports that on Thursday night, HHS Secretary Alex Azar "informed staff that his wife, Jennifer, tested positive for Covid-19, according to an email shared by HHS." The email stated, "Today, my family learned that my wife Jennifer has tested positive for Covid-19." Azar "added that his wife 'scrupulously followed public health guidelines' and immediately self-isolated after her initial symptoms and even after she received a negative diagnosis from an initial instant test." A second test revealed she was positive. Azar said he and children have no symptoms, and they have tested negative. He wrote, "I will be carrying out the duties of my office while strictly adhering to CDC guidelines for essential workers, continuing to practice social distancing, wearing a mask and monitoring for any symptoms."

Among other news outlets covering the story are Bloomberg (12/18, Wingrove, Jacobs, 3.57M), CNN (12/17, Murray, Kelly, 89.21M) and The Hill (12/17, Jenkins, 5.69M).

HHS Allocating $24.5B To Providers Fighting COVID-19 Pandemic.

RevCycle Intelligence (12/17, LaPointe) reports, "HHS, through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), has completed review of Phase 3 Provider Relief Fund applications and will start distributing payments to over 70,000 providers." HHS announced it "will distribute $24.5 billion to providers who applied and were accepted as part of the Phase 3 distribution. The funding is up from the $20 billion originally planned to go out to providers." HHS Secretary Alex Azar is quoted as saying, "HHS is providing more than $24 billion in new relief to more than 70,000 healthcare providers, meeting close to 90 percent of the losses they've

reported from the COVID-19 pandemic in the first half of the year. ... With the Provider Relief Fund, we've been able to support providers hardest hit by COVID-19, including safety net hospitals, rural providers, and nursing homes, helping ensure they can continue serving their communities during and beyond the pandemic."

Healthcare Finance News (12/17, Morse, 93K) also covers the story.

Moderna Vaccine Set To Ship Amid Record Number Of COVID-19 Deaths.

Reuters (12/17, Heavey) reports the US was "ready to ship 5.9 million doses of a new coronavirus vaccine" Thursday, as the FDA was poised to grant Moderna's candidate emergency use authorization as early as Friday, "just as the nation suffered its highest daily COVID-19 death toll with 3,580 lives lost." Amid the worsening crisis, "an FDA panel of outside advisers is weighing the safety and effectiveness of Moderna's vaccine candidate. ... Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar told CNBC on Thursday that 5.9 million Moderna doses, or enough to inoculate half that many people, had been allotted for state governors and were ready to ship nationwide."

Uber Offering 10M Free, Discounted Rides In Effort To Boost COVID-19 Vaccinations.

USA Today (12/17, Murphy, 12.7M) reports "Uber will offer 10 million free or discounted rides to people looking to receive the COVID-19 vaccination." The rides being offered "include transportation to and from their destination, as well as rides for their second and final dose." However, "a date for when the offer will begin rolling out is still not set, according to Uber."

Fox Business (12/17, Manfredi, 3.06M) reports Uber CEO Dara Khosrowshahi said, "We hope our technology can help make the largest-ever global immunization campaign a success and deliver the benefits of the vaccine quickly, effectively and equitably." The campaign "will be in partnership with the National Urban League, the Morehouse School of Medicine, and the National Action Network in order to help communities of color that have been disproportionately hurt by the pandemic." HHS "Secretary Alex Azar said last week that the Trump administration expects to distribute up to 20 million doses of Pfizer and BioNTech's vaccine by the end of this year."

CMS Unveils New Initiative Which Aims To Improve Care Coordination For Dual Eligibles.

FierceHealthcare (12/17, King, 150K) reports, "The Trump administration proposed a new initiative aimed at improving care coordination among Medicaid managed care plans for dual-eligible Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries." This model, which CMS unveiled on Thursday, "will allow Medicaid managed care organizations to participate in the global and professional options in the agency's Direct Contracting model, which offers voluntary risk-sharing agreements with providers." CMS Administrator Seema Verma is quoted as saying, "For too long we have struggled to deliver acceptable outcomes for this vulnerable population, but today's model is a game-changer. ... It represents a significant step toward addressing these longstanding issues and ensuring they receive the coordinated care they rightfully deserve."

Former FDA Chief Gottlieb Hails Rollback Of Frozen Cherry Pie Regulations.

The Hill (12/17, Budryk, 5.69M) reports, "Former Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Scott Gottlieb hailed the FDA's proposed rolling back of federal regulations on frozen cherry pie." The Hill quotes Gottlieb saying in a tweet, "Thanks to the hard work of my FDA team in 2018, the Federal government will no longer be

regulating the contents of frozen cherry pie. The American people are free add extra fruit, sugar, and make the crust especially thick."

Newsweek (12/17, 2.67M) also reports.

Congress To Begin Receiving Coronavirus Vaccinations In Coming Days.

Politico (12/17, Zanona, Levine, Ferris, 6.73M) reports that Congress "will receive a limited batch of the coronavirus vaccine in the coming days, according to multiple sources, marking a major development for lawmakers and frontline workers in a Capitol complex that has battled dozens of cases this year." Vaccines for federal agencies and officials across Washington "have been arriving at Walter Reed Medical Center in recent days, and thousands of doses are expected to be designated for the House and Senate, though congressional leadership offices said they have no information to provide." And "in another sign that vaccinations are imminent on the Hill, the Capitol physician has begun privately informing some members and staff that he has requested vaccines and that his office is making some preparations, including setting up freezer storage."

The Washington Post (12/17, Kane, 10.52M) reports Brian P. Monahan, the attending physician of the U.S. Congress and the Supreme Court, "will soon receive doses of the coronavirus vaccine to administer to the Supreme Court justices and senior members of Congress under a continuity-of-government plan crafted by intelligence experts." Monahan said in a letter, "Congress and the Supreme Court, along with executive branch agencies, will be provided with a specific number of covid-19 doses to meet long-standing requirements for continuity of government operations."

The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Andrews, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports all federal lawmakers will have the ability to get Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine in the coming days. Surgeon General Jerome Adams is mentioned by the Journal.

The Hill (12/17, Budryk, 5.69M) reports that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) "said Thursday that he will receive the coronavirus vaccine in the days ahead."

The Washington Examiner (12/17, Ferrechio, 888K) reports House "Speaker Nancy Pelosi and...McConnell will get a COVID-19 vaccine, the two leaders announced in separate statements Thursday." McConnell said, "Because of government continuity requirements, I have been informed by the Office of the Attending Physician that I am eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine, which I will accept in the coming days." Pelosi "said she would also get the vaccine, citing government continuity."

CNN (12/17, Barrett, Kelly, 89.21M) and USA Today (12/17, Sonka, 12.7M) also report.

Giroir Urges Americans To Continue Taking Precautions Despite Authorization Of Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine.

Healthcare Finance News (12/17, Hackett, 93K) reports that in spite of "the promising outlook provided by the Pfizer and BioNTech vaccine rollout that began earlier this week, officials insist that it is just as critical as ever to take safety measures in preventing the spread of COVID-19." Dr. Admiral Brett Giroir, assistant secretary for Health at HHS, said, "While we're in the process of immunizing the American people, we must keep our guard up. ... We must continue our critical mitigation steps and you know what they are, the three W's: Wear a mask, watch your distance, wash your hands."

Analysis: Trump Fighting To Cling To Presidency, But Not Fighting COVID-19.

A CNN (12/18, Reston, 89.21M) analysis asks "what President Donald Trump [is] doing in the waning days of his presidency as the number of Covid-19 deaths in the US soared past 3,000 each day." The piece says he has spent most of the recent weeks "plotting how to nullify the results of President-elect Joe Biden's November victory," but "has been silent" on important national issues. "Perhaps most baffling about Trump's disappearance, he has stayed out of the public eye when he could have taken a victory lap following the US Food and Drug Administration's historic authorization of the first Covid-19 vaccine." The article concludes with a section on the FDA's expected approval of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine candidate, citing a Thursday statement from FDA Commissioner Dr. Stephen Hahn and Dr. Peter Marks, director of the FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research.

Cognitive Impairment Could Complicate COVID-19 Vaccination Efforts In Long-Term Care Facilities.

Kaiser Health News (12/17, Graham) reports "long-term care residents' participation in the fastest and most extensive vaccination effort in U.S. history is clouded by a significant complication: More than half have cognitive impairment or dementia." This statistic "raises a number of questions," such as, "what if surrogates don't agree with the decision an elderly person has made and try to intervene?" With COVID-19 "outbreaks increasing, already-overwhelmed staffers may not have much time to sit down with residents to answer questions or have conversations with families over the phone" about the vaccine. CDC National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases Director Nancy Messonnier "acknowledged the agency was 'very concerned' that information about vaccines be adequately explained to long-term care residents." Something that must "be made clear to residents" is that "while vaccines have been tested on people age 65 and older, those tests did not include individuals living in long-term care, according to Dr. Sara Oliver, a CDC expert."

After Report On Trump Administration Influence On CDC Messaging, Question Of Commission Arises.

NBC News (12/17, Todd, Murray, Dann, Holzberg, 4.91M) reports, "Our question this morning: Is Congress going to create a 9/11-like commission to study what went wrong with the United States' handling of the coronavirus – after more than 300,000 and counting deaths, an erosion in trust in our government and allegations of political interference and manipulation?" The "latest development here: A pair of CDC political appointees told the New York Times about how the Trump administration exerted ever-increasing influence over the agency's message and data." That "comes after a whistleblower alleged that CDC director Robert Redfield directed staff to delete an email from a Trump political appointee that sought changes to scientific reports, as well as after the CDC and FDA bungled the United States' initial coronavirus testing plan."

The Hill (12/17, Budryk, 5.69M) reports that House Majority Whip James Clyburn (D-SC) "said Thursday that the federal response to the coronavirus pandemic may require a commission similar to the one that investigated the leadup to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks." Clyburn "discussed the idea with MSNBC's Chuck Todd, following the disclosure of emails in which [the] White House pushed a strategy of 'herd immunity' in response to the virus."

The Hilton Head Island (SC) Packet (12/17, Monk, 105K) also reports.

CDC Estimates A Record 81,000 People Died From Drug Overdoses In 12-Month Period.

Axios (12/17, Fernandez, 1.26M) reports that an "estimated 81,000 people died from a drug overdose between June 2019 and May 2020, the highest number ever recorded in a 12-month period, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report released on Thursday." The provisional data suggest "the pandemic accelerated overdose deaths." CDC Director Robert Redfield said in a statement: "The disruption to daily life due to the COVID-19 pandemic has hit those with substance use disorder hard."

The Hill (12/17, Kelley, 5.69M) and the Washington Examiner (12/17, Hogberg, 888K) also report.

First Doses Of Coronavirus Vaccine Administered In Native American Communities.

The AP (12/17, Lee, Johnson) reports, "The first doses of the coronavirus vaccine are being administered in Native American communities from the desert highlands of New Mexico to a coastal fishing tribe outside Seattle as the federal government and states rush to protect one of the most vulnerable U.S. populations." The "two-pronged effort includes a massive logistical operation by the federal government's Indian Health Service focusing on vaccinating health care workers at sovereign Indigenous nation clinics across the country and urban clinics serving off-reservation Native Americans." The agency's "initial allotment of about 22,000 vaccine doses from Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech arrived Monday at distribution centers on vast portions of the Navajo Nation in Arizona and New Mexico and in urban places like Phoenix, where hundreds of health care workers who care for Native Americans got vaccinated on Thursday."

NPR (12/17, Oxner, 3.69M) reports "about 68,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses will initially be distributed among the population, the Indian Health Service said last week." NPR adds that "Kailee Fretland, an Indian Health Service hospital pharmacist at the Red Lake Nation in Minnesota, helped design the vaccine distribution plans in an effort to avoid" having the pandemic disproportionately affect American Indian populations.

Finding Way To Vaccinate Black Americans For COVID-19 Reportedly Is A "Conundrum."

US News & World Report (12/17, Williams, 1.91M) reports that "finding a way to get a potentially game-changing [COVID-19] vaccine...into the arms of" Black Americans, who are "among those who need it most, is a conundrum that would vex King Solomon himself." Putting people "of color ahead of other groups for the vaccine is good public health practice, [Dr. Chris Beyrer, an epidemiologist and professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health,] says: They are canaries in the COVID-19 coal mine." Before "the vaccine rollout, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices acknowledged that mitigating racial inequities should be a factor in distributing the vaccine." CDC Director "Robert Redfield underscored the need in a statement accepting the committee's initial recommendation for priority groups, encouraging a future call to prioritize older people in multigenerational households."

Panel Of Vaccination Experts To Discuss Who Should Receive COVID-19 Vaccine After Nursing Home Residents, Healthcare Workers.

The AP (12/18, Stobbe) reports "a federal panel of vaccination experts takes up" the question of who will get vaccinated for COVID-19 after nursing home residents and healthcare workers "at an emergency meeting this weekend. No matter what the committee decides, there will be differences from state to state." According to the AP, "the panelists are leaning toward putting 'essential workers' first because bus drivers, grocery store clerks and similar employees can't work from home." However, "other experts say people age 65 and older should be

next, along with people with certain medical conditions." CDC Director Robert Redfield "has said he believes priority should be given to people age 70 and older who live with children or grandchildren."

Scammers Attempting To Exploit COVID-19 Vaccine To Get People's Social Security Numbers, Officials Say.

The Hill (12/17, Deese, 5.69M) reports "scammers are attempting to exploit the news of the coronavirus vaccine by offering fake vaccine access for individuals who give their Social Security number to callers, public health officials have cautioned." Authorities "are warning about scammers targeting unsuspecting individuals seeking a vaccine, NBC News reports." Nenette Day, assistant special agent in charge at HHS' Office of Inspector General, said, "If you're receiving unsolicited offers for a vaccine -- not one, not two, but about 10 red flags should go up. ... There is no way that you under any circumstance should deal with anybody except a known and reputable medical provider or pharmacy."

US Made Deal To Keep Temperature Monitoring System Active In Ultra-Cold Coolers For Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine.

STAT (12/17, Goldhill, 262K) reports a "snafu...threatened to disrupt the smooth rollout" of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, over "how to monitor the temperature of the ultra-cold storage containers being used to distribute vials." Pfizer, according to sources unnamed, "planned to disconnect temperature-monitoring sensors on the containers once they were delivered to health care providers." Under a "$25 million deal...with Controlant Global, an Icelandic company that created the proprietary temperature-monitoring platform for all Pfizer's shipping containers," Pfizer will turn off the monitoring system when the coolers are delivered "and the federal government will simultaneously turn the system back on." HHS spokeswoman Natalie Baldassarre said, "Pfizer will de-activate the temperature monitor on their shipping container once they are delivered. Operation Warp Speed contracted with the manufacturer of the device to immediately re-activate it with no loss of temperature monitoring and no loss of data."

National Front Page News

Headlines From Today's Front Pages.

Wall Street Journal:

Moderna's Covid-19 Vaccine Gets Backing From FDA Advisory Panel
Hack Suggests New Scope, Sophistication For Cyberattacks
More States Hit Google Over Alleged Monopoly Conduct
Roku Torments Entertainment Giants In Quest To Dominate Streaming
Matching Christmas Pajamas Are Either The Best Or Worst Part Of The Holidays
Nigerian Boys Taken In Kidnapping Claimed By Boko Haram Are Freed

New York Times:

Biden Faces Challenge as Congress Drops State Aid to Secure Stimulus
More Hacking Attacks Found As Officials Warn Of 'Grave Risk' To US Government

FDA Panel Endorses Moderna's Covid-19 Vaccine
Some Health Care Workers Are Getting the Vaccine. Others Aren't. Who Decides?
Biden Picks Deb Haaland To Lead Interior Department
Even When The Music Returns, Pandemic Pay Cuts Will Linger

Washington Post:
Approval Of Second Vaccine Expected
Stimulus Talks Expected To Spill Over To Weekend
Historic Picks Put Focus On Environmental Justice
Africa Watches, And Waits
New Tactics Utilized In Hack

Financial Times:
Emmanuel Macron Tests Positive For Coronavirus
EU And China Revive Hopes Of Investment Deal This Year
US Says Cyber Hack Poses 'Grave Risk' To Critical Infrastructure

Washington Times:
Secret Weapon: GOP Turns To Georgia Evangelicals To Save Senate Majority
New Shutdowns Threaten Small Businesses, Economic Recovery As Congress Squabbles Over Relief
'Trumpian Politics': Army Straight Shooter Navigates Wide Ranging Civilian-Military Minefield
'Toss Out Aggression': Ax-Throwing Club Provides 'Satisfying' Pandemic Outlet
Small Business Owners Buck Gretchen Whitmer's Shutdown: 'We Don't Have Any Other Option'
North Face Accused Of 'Virtue-Signaling' For Refusing Oil-And-Gas Firm's Jacket Order

Story Lineup From Last Night's Network News:
ABC: Vaccines; COVID Surge; Winter Storm; Congress-Relief Bill; Chicago-Social Worker Wrongfully Raided By Police; Russia-Cyberattack; Biden-Sec. of Interior; Tiger Woods-PNC Championship; Made In America Christmas.
CBS: COVID Surge; Vaccines; Winter Storm; Congress-Relief Bill; Biden-Hunter Biden; Russia-Cyberattack; Chicago-Social Worker Wrongfully Raided By Police; NFL-Super Bowl; School Custodian Receives Kidney From 3rd Grade Teacher.
NBC: Vaccines; COVID Surge; Congress-Relief Bill; Winter Storm; Chicago-Social Worker Wrongfully Raided By Police; Perdue Pharma; Russia-Cyberattack; Olympics; Holiday Shipping; Coronavirus Origins; 5th Grade Teacher Inspires Students.

Network TV At A Glance:
Vaccines – 9 minutes, 40 seconds
COVID Surge – 9 minutes, 20 seconds
Congress-Relief Bill – 4 minutes, 50 seconds
Russia-Cyberattack – 4 minutes, 40 seconds
Chicago-Social Worker Wrongfully Raided By Police – 3 minutes, 20 seconds

Story Lineup From This Morning's Radio News Broadcasts:
ABC: COVID Surge; Alex Azar-Wife Tests Positive; Moderna Vaccine; Pfizer Vaccine Shipments; Congress-Relief Bill.
CBS: COVID Surge; Moderna Vaccine; Pfizer Vaccine Shipments; Congress-Relief Bill; Winter Storm; Biden-Cabinet Nominees.
FOX: Moderna Vaccine; Johnson & Johnson Vaccine; COVID Surge; Russia-Cyberattack.
NPR: Moderna Vaccine; COVID Surge; Biden-EPA Nominee; Georgia-Runoffs.

Last Laughs

Late Night Political Humor.

Jimmy Kimmel: "Mike Pence is expected to get his first of two Pfizer shots tomorrow. He and his wife Karen are doing it on television to show that the vaccine is safe. I guess the thinking is, if it's good enough for America's first Karen, it should be good enough for the rest of them too."

Jimmy Kimmel: "But this is exciting for Mike Pence. Getting vaccinated is the only time Mother ever does shots with him."

Jimmy Kimmel: "It's worth mentioning that Mike Pence, who is the head of the COVID task force, wrote an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal six months ago saying there would be no second wave of the virus, this is nothing but hysteria from the media. So maybe save that dose for someone else. The only cure Mike Pence should get is a bottle of Clorox and a heat lamp."

Jimmy Kimmel: "Only 34 more days to go. We're now on what feels like 200 days of 'Squattergate.' Trump has been floating the idea that he will refuse to leave office, as if that is even an option. As if this was like a bad roommate situation."

Jimmy Kimmel: "Here's a fun thing for those who might be looking for a holiday gift. The mayor of Atlantic City is auctioning off the chance to blow up one of Donald Trump's former casinos, for real. The money will go to charity. The closed Plaza Casino is scheduled to get demolished. Whoever donates the most money gets to push the button. We should chip in and get this for Hillary Clinton, right?"

Jimmy Kimmel: "Of course, the easiest way to make a Trump casino implode is to just put Trump back in charge of running it again."

Stephen Colbert: "Here's the deal: Pharmacists have found that when they used glass vials that were supposed to contain five doses, sometimes they can squeeze out an additional dose. ... And we're going to need that extra vaccine, because the White House is sticking with its pandemic plan of 'not having a plan.'"

Stephen Colbert: "Yesterday, we learned of emails from one of the President's health appointees, former HHS science adviser Paul Alexander. ... This summer, Alexander urged top health officials to adopt a 'herd immunity' approach to COVID-19 and allow millions of Americans to be infected by the virus, thereby changing the

Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Hell and Human Sacrifice. Because here's the thing about Paul Alexander's strategy: It would require almost three million deaths to reach herd immunity. If your plan to save humanity involves killing millions of people, you're not a health adviser. You're a Marvel villain."

Stephen Colbert: "In the face of the COVID raging, the President-elect is asking Americans to stay home [for his inauguration]. If enough people do the right thing, his inauguration could end up looking a lot like the last one."

Stephen Colbert: "If they do manage to pry the current President from the White House, he may need to find a different place to live because residents surrounding Mar-a-Lago recently sent the town a letter with a message for the outgoing-commander-in-chief: We don't want you to be our neighbor. It's all in the new documentary, 'Won't You Suck It, Neighbor?'"

Jimmy Fallon: "Yesterday, the FDA said the Pfizer vaccine vials hold extra doses, which could expand the national supply by up to 40 percent. To explain it to Trump, they said it's like finding an extra McNugget in your 20-piece."

Jimmy Fallon: "Today, Pfizer said that it has millions more doses in a warehouse, but the government hasn't given them instructions on where to send them. Well, it finally happened. Trump made his first mistake dealing with the coronavirus. Seriously, not a good sign that we're gonna need the Domino's pizza tracker for the vaccine."

Jimmy Fallon: "Congressional leaders are nearing a compromise on a $900 billion COVID stimulus deal that is set to include $600 checks per person. I think it would go a long way – for anyone paying $50 a month in rent. Six hundred dollars? Come on. If you're not going to give anyone real money, just send everyone a PS5."

Jimmy Fallon: "In January, Atlantic City is blowing up a former Trump casino, and the highest bidder in a live auction will be the one to press the button. I say we hold Biden's inauguration in Atlantic City, and then let him push the button."

Jimmy Fallon: "You know that two seconds before they do it, Eric Trump is going to wander out of the front door like, 'Is the event not inside?'"

James Corden: "Vice President Mike Pence is about to find himself in quite an uncomfortable situation. On January 6, he has to appear in front of Congress to confirm Joe Biden's victory over Donald Trump. Well, word has just come out that Pence will then immediately travel to the Middle East to avoid the wrath of Trump and his supporters."

Jimmy Fallon: "You know things are turbulent in the White House when you go to the Middle East for a bit of peace and quiet. He is stopping in Bahrain and Israel. He's then headed off to Poland, or as Mike Pence calls that, a real tropical getaway."

Jimmy Fallon: "Pence said he will be receiving the COVID-19 vaccine injection tomorrow live on television. ... Now as you know, the vaccine has to be kept at super cold temperatures, so I'm sure it is going to do just fine inside Mike Pence."

Jimmy Fallon: "But Pence will publicly receive the vaccine to promote its safety and build confidence among the American people. And nothing promotes confidence quite like getting the vaccine and then immediately fleeing the country."

Seth Meyers: "President Trump attacked Fox News on Twitter yesterday and said he, quote, 'can't believe how badly Fox News is doing in the ratings.' Really? You can't? You were their number one show, and you got canceled."

Seth Meyers: "White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said this week that President Trump plans to veto the $740 billion defense spending bill, despite passing Congress with a veto-proof majority. Said Trump, 'How many times do I have to say it? I don't understand how any of this works.'"

National News

Trump Reiterates His Intention To Veto NDAA.

CNBC (12/17, Macias, Breuninger, 7.34M) reports on its website that on Thursday, President Trump "said...he will reject the sweeping defense bill that authorizes a topline of $740 billion in spending and outlines Pentagon policy." Trump tweeted, "I will Veto the Defense Bill, which will make China very unhappy. They love it. Must have Section 230 termination, protect our National Monuments and allow for removal of military from far away, and very unappreciative, lands. Thank you!"

Politico (12/17, Ferris, O'Brien, Caygle, 6.73M) says Congress "is gearing up for the first veto override" of Donald Trump's presidency. Congressional leaders "are scrambling to avoid an unusual scenario in which lawmakers are summoned back to Washington in the days between Christmas and New Year's for a dramatic, eleventh-hour vote to overturn Trump's promised veto." Bloomberg (12/17, 3.57M) says "a Senate vote on overriding...Trump's expected veto of a massive defense bill may prove to be a final test of the Republican party's loyalty to the commander-in-chief." Senate Armed Services Chairman James Inhofe said he expects the Senate "would return to hold a vote" if the House overrides the President.

WSJournal Says Bill Must Include Tomahawk Missiles. The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says in an editorial that Congress should adopt a final version of the bill that allocates about $100 million that the Marines are seeking for Tomahawk missiles, arguing that the appropriation is essential for keeping China in check.

NYTimes Analysis: Trump Judges More Conservative Than Other GOP-Appointed Peers.

The New York Times (12/17, Ruiz, Gebeloff, 20.6M) reports that President Trump's "conservative imprint...on the federal courts is only deepening." An analysis of decisions by the "appellate bench -- where nearly all contested federal litigation ends -- shows the transformation of the judiciary" under Trump. A Times review of "more than 10,000 published decisions and dissents during the first three years of the Trump administration" found that Trump's "picks for the appeals courts were more likely than past Republican appointees to disagree with peers

selected by Democrats, and more likely to agree with their Republican colleagues, suggesting they were more consistently conservative."

Tuberville Could Join House Members In Effort To Contest Electoral Vote Count.

USA Today (12/17, Garrison, 12.7M) reports Sen.-elect Tommy Tuberville (R-AL) said this week that he may join members of the House in objecting to Joe Biden's victory when Congress meets to affirm the Electoral College vote on January 6, despite Senate Majority Leader McConnell's warning to GOP senators against doing so. Tuberville said, "You'll see what's coming. You've been reading about in the House. We're going to have to do it in the Senate." Alabama Live (12/17, 497K) reports Tuberville campaign chairman Stan McDonald said, "I don't know yet if or when he will do this. He's very seriously considering it."

Kemp Says He And His Family Have Received "Death Threats." The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (12/17, 1.46M) reports Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp (R) "is fed up with the unrelenting attacks from conspiracy theorists calling on him to overturn [Biden's] victory in Georgia. But he's even more enraged that some of those peddlers of false claims are targeting his wife and three daughters." Kemp said, "It has gotten ridiculous – from death threats, [claims of] bribes from China, the social media posts that my children are getting."

Rice Defeats Ocasio-Cortez For Energy And Commerce Seat.

Politico (12/17, Ferris, Caygle, 6.73M) reports Rep. Kathleen Rice (D-NY) "has captured a prized seat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee after a contentious showdown" with Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY). Rice "ultimately won in a lopsided vote of 46-13" in secret balloting in the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee. Politico says the two had "been battling behind the scenes for weeks to secure one of the few open seats" on the committee.

Pence Campaigns For GOP Senate Candidates In Georgia.

The Washington Post (12/17, Sonmez, 10.52M) reports that on Thursday, Vice President Pence "made another trip to Georgia" to campaign for Sens. Kelly Loeffler (R-GA) and David Perdue (R-GA). Pence "pledged that the Republican ticket would 'keep fighting' to reverse the election results but tacitly acknowledged the prospect of a Biden presidency. ... 'A Republican Senate majority could be the last line of defense to preserve all that we've done for this country,' Pence told a crowd in Columbus that greeted him with chants of 'four more years.'"

The AP (12/17, Nadler, Barrow) says Pence is "seemingly holding rallies everywhere in Georgia lately – except Atlanta and its inner suburbs." The AP reports that Pence "returned Thursday for events in Columbus, on the state's western edge, and Macon, in middle Georgia." Pence "previously stopped in Augusta in the east, Savannah on the coast and the north Georgia cities of Gainesville and Canton, in the far reaches of metro Atlanta's exurbs." The Hill (12/17, Samuels, 5.69M) and the Fox News (12/17, Steinhauser, 23.99M) website also cover Pence's visit.

Nearly 76,000 New Georgia Voters Have Registered Since Election. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (12/17, 1.46M) reports, "Nearly 76,000 new voters registered in Georgia since before the presidential election, enough to make a difference in the U.S. Senate runoffs if they turn out." However, "just 2,670 of the new voters have cast ballots in the runoffs through Tuesday, most of them during in-person early voting this week."

Polls Getting Little Attention In Race. The New York Times (12/17, Russonello, 20.6M) writes that there is little focus on polling in the race. No public pollster "has completed a live telephone survey in the Georgia runoffs," and "representatives from campaigns on both sides of the aisle said that they didn't have a big appetite for horse race polls this time around, since the races will almost certainly be close."

GOP Could Have Flipped House With Fewer Than 32,000 Votes In Key Districts.

Inside Elections (12/17) observes that if GOP leads in IA2 and NY22 stand, "Republicans will be five seats shy of a [House] majority. In the five closest races won by Democrats, the Republican candidates lost by a combined 31,751 votes."

Biden Chooses Haaland For Interior Secretary.

The AP (12/17, Knickmeyer) reports Joe Biden will nominate Rep. Deb Haaland (D-NM) for interior secretary, "a historic pick that would make her the first Native American to lead the powerful federal agency that has wielded influence over the nation's tribes for generations." ABC World News Tonight (12/17, story 7, 0:15, Muir, 7.31M) also called it "a historic Cabinet nomination" that would make Haaland "the first Native American appointed to a Cabinet position."

The Washington Post (12/17, Grandoni, 10.52M) says progressives "launched an unusual public campaign to place an American Indian at the helm of Interior." The New York Times (12/17, Davenport, 20.6M) says if confirmed, Haaland will lead "an agency that for much of the nation's history played a central role in the dislocation and abuse of Indigenous communities from coast to coast." The Albuquerque (NM) Journal (12/17, 188K) reports Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez "called it a 'historic and unprecedented day' for all indigenous people, pointing out the Interior Department oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education."

The Los Angeles Times (12/17, 3.37M) says Haaland would also "take over a department mired in controversy over the Trump administration's campaign to open up sensitive land and offshore areas to oil and gas development. She will also be responsible for implementing Biden's promise to end oil and gas leasing on land controlled by the federal government – a move certain to face backlash from oil-dependent states, including her own, and lawsuits from the fossil fuel industry." Reuters (12/17, Hunnicutt, Renshaw), the Santa Fe New Mexican (12/17, Wyland, 65K), Axios (12/17, Nichols, McCammond, Swan, 1.26M), Politico (12/17, Pager, Thompson, 6.73M), The Hill (12/17, Beitsch, 5.69M), Roll Call (12/17, Hulac, 130K), and the CNN (12/17, Zeleny, Merica, Krieg, Lee, 89.21M) and Fox News (12/17, McFall, 23.99M) websites also cover the selection.

Biden Picks Regan For EPA. The AP (12/17, Knickmeyer, Robertson) reports Biden has nominated North Carolina Secretary of Environmental Quality Michael Regan to head the EPA. Regan "has made a name pursuing cleanups of industrial toxins and helping low-income and minority communities hit hardest by pollution." The Raleigh (NC) News & Observer (12/17, 396K) reports, "One source familiar with the transition's thinking said that Regan was chosen in part due to his work holding polluters accountable, citing his leadership reaching the largest coal-ash clean-up settlement in U.S. history with Duke Energy."

Politico (12/17, Pager, Colman, Guillén, 6.73M) reports, "For weeks, California regulator Mary Nichols was seen as the top contender for the job, but environmental justice groups argued that she had not worked aggressively enough to address systemic pollution problems in communities of color and low-income areas." The New York Times (12/17, Friedman, 20.6M) says Regan "was not [Biden's] first choice, and he lacks some of the

political star power of Mr. Biden's other cabinet picks. But he will be on the front lines of the incoming administration's effort to undo one of President Trump's most sprawling transformations of the federal government: the unraveling of a half-century of pollution and climate regulations, and the diminishment of the science that underpinned them."

Townhall (12/17, O'Brien, 359K) writes, "Much has been made of the diversity that appears to be making up Biden's cabinet. For instance, the media were quick to praise Biden for picking Buttigieg as the first openly gay nominee for a cabinet post, but conservatives noted that former ambassador to Germany and acting Director of National Intelligence Richard Grenell became the first openly gay cabinet member in February of 2020." The Washington Post (12/17, Dennis, Mufson, Eilperin, 10.52M), the Wall Street Journal (12/17, Puko, Collins, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), and Axios (12/17, Nichols, 1.26M) also cover the choice.

Iger Wants To Be Ambassador To China. The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Schwartzel, Glazer, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports Walt Disney Co. Executive Chairman Bob Iger has told Biden's team that he is interested in serving as ambassador to China, sources said.

Blinken Attends Meetings And Briefings At State Department. The Washington Post (12/17, Sonmez, 10.52M) reports that on Thursday, Secretary of State-designate Tony Blinken "attended meetings and briefings" at the State Department for the first time. The Post says the briefings "happened despite the lack of an acknowledgment" by Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo "that Biden won the election."

O'Malley Dillon Says She "Could Have Chosen Better" Words. USA Today (12/17, Behrmann, 12.7M) reports incoming Deputy Chief of Staff Jen O'Malley Dillon on Thursday "backpedaled on calling congressional Republicans an expletive." O'Malley Dillon said, "I used some words that I probably could have chosen better." Politico (12/17, Forgey, Choi, 6.73M) reports O'Malley Dillon "argued that 'the point that I was really making...is an incredibly important point. And that really is about the president-elect and why he was supported by over 81 million people, and what they were looking for.' She went on to restate Biden's belief that we can get things done, and we can get them done if we come together.'"

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- South Dakota To Receive Additional COVID-19 Vaccine Doses In Coming Weeks.
- Houston-Area Officials Push Vaccine Communications To Latino Population.
- Nevada Flooded With Applications From Small Businesses For Pandemic Relief.
- Illinois Governor Says Earlier Notice Of COVID-19 Vaccine Deliveries Should Help In Scheduling Appointments.
- Indiana To Get Additional 13K Vaccine Doses Per Week Soon, Governor Says.
- Portland Region To Get Additional 17K Vaccine Doses, State Officials Say.
- Los Angeles County Elementary Schools Could Be Eligible To Reopen In Two To Three Weeks.
- Virginia, DC Announce Changes To Vaccine Distribution Processes.
- California Turns To Blue Shield For Oversight Of State's Vaccination Effort After Shaky Rollout.
- Los Angeles Mayor Receives First COVID-19 Vaccine Dose.
- Early Data Show COVID-19 Vaccines Are As Safe As Studies Suggested They Would Be.
- Opinion: Conspiracy Theorists, Anti-Vaxxers Are Not The Only Groups Skeptical Of COVID-19 Vaccine.
- FDA Warns More Than Half Of Hand Sanitizers Coming From Mexico Contain Dangerous Levels Of Methanol.
- California To Broaden Bisphenol A Warning Labels After State Supreme Court Rejects Appeal.
- Academic Interviewed About His "User's Guide" To Section 1498.
- Opinion: Experts Say Biden Administration Should Support Tobacco Harm Reduction.
- Opinion: US Must Onshore Pharmaceutical Supply Chains To Ensure Safe, Reliable Access To Drugs.
- Editorial: Big Tobacco's Response To Black Lives Matter Protests Is Hollow, Manipulative.

• Over One-Third Of Kentucky Middle, High Schoolers Say E-Cigarette Use Has Increased During Pandemic.
• PMTA Included In Biden Administration's Freeze On Rules.
• Daily Lower-Dose Aspirin May Help Prevent A Second Pregnancy Loss, Analysis Suggests.
• Researchers Develop Neuroprosthetic Device For Orthostatic Hypotension In Patients With Spinal Cord Injuries.
• IUD Containing Levonorgestrel May Work As Well As Morning-After Oral Contraceptives, Study Suggests.
• Alcohol Consumption Can Immediately Trigger AFib, Research Suggests.
• Firefighters Demand Independent Testing For Cancer-Linked Chemicals In Gear.
• Opinion: Federal Incentives, Alcohol Subsidies Add To Growing Health Burden.
• HHS Cancels Last-Minute Trump Plan To Let More Physicians Prescribe Opioid-Treatment Drug.
• Medical Societies, Advocacy Groups Urge Officials To Dedicate Opioid Settlement Funds For Substance Use Disorder Treatment.
• AHA Urges CMS To Withdraw The "Most Favored Nation" Drug-Pricing Rule.
• Group Including Former CMS, FDA Heads Suggests Drug Pricing Policies For Biden Administration.
• Biden Administration Asks For Additional 60 Days To Respond To Lawsuit Against Trump Administration's Drug Import Rule.
• Primary Care Physicians Among The Last In Line To Receive, Distribute COVID-19 Vaccines.

Global Health News

• WHO Team Emerges From Quarantine To Investigate Coronavirus Origins In Wuhan.
• WHO Advises Against Pregnant Women Receiving The Moderna Coronavirus Vaccine.
• AstraZeneca UK Vaccine Partner Says Production Schedules For Shot Have Not Been Affected After Getting Suspicious Package.
• WHO Emergencies Chief Says COVID-19 Vaccines Can Likely Be Adapted Quickly To Address Mutations.
• EU Urges AstraZeneca To Abide By Vaccine Supply Commitments.
• EU Nations' COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Going Slowly So Far.
• Cyprus To Begin Easing COVID-19 Lockdown Measures Next Month.
• Tanzania's President Casts Doubt On COVID-19 Vaccines.
• COVID-19 Lockdown In England Will Remain In Place Until Early March, Johnson Says.
• South Africa Prepares To Roll Out COVID-19 Vaccine To Healthcare Workers.
• Holocaust Survivors In Austria, Slovakia Get First Dose Of COVID-19 Vaccines.
• Spain Running Out Of COVID-19 Vaccines, Health Authorities Warn.
• Calmer Night Of Protests Against COVID-19 Measures In Netherlands Despite 131 Arrests, Police Say.
• Israel's Early COVID-19 Vaccination Success Threatened By New Coronavirus Variants.
• China Rolls Out Anal Swab COVID-19 Test.
• Hong Kong Setting Up 18 Community Vaccination Centers For Pfizer's COVID-19 Shot.
• International Olympic Committee Gaining Confidence Tokyo Games Will Be Held This Summer.
• Africa Faces More Lethal COVID-19 Wave.
• Guam Plans To Extend COVID-19 Vaccination Eligibility To Child Care Workers.
• Most People In Israel Can Still Be Infected By Coronavirus After Initial Dose Of Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine, Study Suggests.

• Chile Approves AstraZeneca's COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Humanitarian Disaster Unfolding In Manaus As New Coronavirus Variant Spreads.
• COVID-19 Has Killed Over 260 Physicians In Peru.
• Over One Million COVID-19 Deaths In North And South America, PAHO Says.
• Brazilian Lawmaker Says Pandemic Not Enough To Impeach Bolsonaro.
• Johnson Receives Criticism For Comments Defending British Government's COVID-19 Response.
• British Government Faces Legal Fight Over COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.
• South Africa Approves Anti-Parasite Drug For Use In Patients With COVID-19.
• New Zealand, Vietnam, Taiwan Rank Highest On COVID Performance Index.
• Airline Industry Urges WHO To Say People Can Safely Fly Without Quarantining After COVID-19 Vaccination.
• India Says It Has Contained COVID-19, Reporting No New Cases In A Fifth Of Its Districts For One Week.
• GSK To Shift Production Of Malaria Vaccine To Bharat Biotech.
• Poland's Top Court Confirms Recent Ruling Tightening Abortion Laws.
• Thailand Legislators Vote To Make Abortion Legal In First Trimester.
• EU To Recommend Countries Introduce Vaping Bans For Public Places.

HHS in the News

• Hundreds Of Millions In Funds Allocated For Biomedical Research At HHS Diverted For Other Purposes, Investigation Concludes.
• House Panel Investigating Trump Administration's Purchase Of $70M Worth Of Inadequate Ventilators.
• CDC Says More Than 20M Americans Have Received At Least One Dose Of COVID-19 Vaccine.
• Nevada Leaders Say COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign Will Soon Be Improved.
• During First Biden Administration COVID-19 Briefing, White House Commits To Sending Each State 10M Vaccine Doses Per Week.
• CDC Mulling COVID-19 Testing For Domestic Air Travel, Official Says.
• Researchers Say In-Person School Instruction Can Be Safe; Teachers Still Demanding Vaccinations Before Returning To Classrooms.
• Texas Officials Say Number Of Patients With COVID-19 Still "Big Concern" Despite Drop In Hospitalizations.
• White House Health Officials Shed Light On Why COVID-19 Vaccines Delivered To States Have Not Been Used.
• Investment, Collaboration In Diagnostic Tools Will Be Critical For Targeting Patients Who Have COVID-19 Long Term, Acting FDA Head Says.
• Analysis Explains Why Demand For Coronavirus Vaccines Is Outpacing Supplies Worldwide.
• Columnist: Coronavirus Variants Mean Worst Of Pandemic Could Be Yet To Come.
• Biden Administration Reportedly Delaying Executive Orders On Immigration, Including Task Force To Reunite Families.
• Information Blocking Remains Prevalent Among EHR Vendors, Health Systems, Study Indicates.
• Columnist: Becerra Is "The Right Man" To Lead HHS.

National Front Page News

• Headlines From Today's Front Pages.

Last Laughs

• Late Night Political Humor.

National News

• Biden Takes Executive Action Against "Existential Threat" Of Climate Change.
• Monmouth Poll: Biden Approval 54%, Disapproval 30%, With Wide Partisan Divide.
• Administration Creating Commission To Study SCOTUS, Judiciary Reforms.
• CFPB Expected To Exercise Its Powers Under Biden.
• FCC's Rosenworcel Pushing To Reinstate Net Neutrality Rules.
• Census Bureau Will Deliver US House Data In April.
• Los Angeles Officials Hope Biden Order Will Help Shelter Thousands Of Homeless People.
• WPost Examines District Of Columbia Statehood Push.
• NYTimes Analysis: Progressives Believe Biden Will Ultimately Back Eliminating Filibuster.
• Leahy Health Scare Highlights "Fragile" Democratic Senate Control.
• Video Shows Greene "Harassing" Parkland Survivor Hogg.
• Sinclair Broadcast Group Ending Bolling Show.
• Kaine Floats Trump Censure As Votes Appear Short For Senate Conviction.
• McDaniel Says RNC Will Be "Neutral" In 2024 If Trump Runs Again.
• Politico Analysis: Retirements Hamper GOP Bid To Take Back Senate In 2022.
• Valadao Gets GOP Challenger In CA21 After Voting To Impeach Trump.
• Lewandowski-Founded Group Raising Money For Cheney Challenger.
• Kennedy Creates PAC, But Says He Has "No Plans" To Seek Office.

NIH News

Bill Gates Warned About A Pandemic; And Enough About Microchips, He Says.

USA Today (1/27, Weise, 12.7M) reports that on Wednesday, Bill and Melinda Gates "released their annual letter," which focused on COVID-19. To date, their "foundation has pledged $1.75 billion for COVID-19 response, in addition to its decadelong funding of underlying vaccine technologies." Bill Gates said, "The U.S. Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, housed within the Department of Health and Human Services, put up more money toward research and development for COVID-19 vaccines than all other groups combined."

Additional Sources. Bloomberg (1/27, Paton, 3.57M) reports, "Gates outlined an ambitious plan to stop the next pandemic, calling for a global alert system, massive testing, a cadre of 3,000 'first responders' ready to spring into action and tens of billions of dollars of annual spending."

CNN (1/27, 89.21M), which was adapted from their annual letter, Bill and Melinda Gates say, "The experience of living through a pandemic has driven home what many people in developing countries knew all too well already: Health is the bedrock of any thriving society."

Forbes (1/27, Ray, 10.33M) reports Bill "Gates told Reuters that the 'crazy conspiracy theories' about him and the U.S.' top infectious disease official Anthony Fauci were most likely caused by the frightening nature of the pandemic and the rise of social media." In "the interview, Gates also praised Dr. Fauci and Francis Collins, the head of the U.S. National Institutes of Health, calling them 'smart' and 'wonderful people.'"

The Hill (1/27, Jenkins, 5.69M) reports, "Conspiracy theories claiming that both Gates and Fauci created the pandemic in an effort to profit from its spread and to control people have made their rounds on the internet." Gates said he's "proud of the work that Fauci and head of the U.S. [NIH], Francis Collins, have done so far."

Newsweek (1/27, Speare-Cole, 2.67M) reports, "Gates has said he is 'excited' about the team President Joe Biden has picked to tackle the coronavirus pandemic, a stark contrast to the harsh criticism he handed out to some of Donald Trump's team." Biden chose "top U.S. infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci and head of the U.S. [NIH]Francis Collins to lead the country's response to the COVID-19 crisis."

The New York Post (1/27, Fonrouge, 7.45M) reports Gates said "he's excited to see" Collins and Fauci "have the opportunity to speak truthfully and effectively about science under President Joe Biden's new administration."

The Hill (1/27, Choi, 5.69M) reports Bill and Melinda Gates "said they are concerned the pandemic will create 'immunity inequality,' where only the wealthiest people have access to the COVID-19 vaccine." President Biden's surgeon general nominee, "Vivek Murthy, has also addressed the vaccine inequity being seen in the U.S., acknowledging that rural communities and communities of color have been especially affected by the pandemic." According to CDC data, "more than 23 million doses of the vaccine have been administered in the U.S. so far, with more than 44 million doses distributed."

Also reporting are the Daily Caller (1/27, Ingrassia, 375K) and the HuffPost (1/27, Blum, 363K).

NIH Director: Collaboration Amid Chaos, And Biden's First 100 Days.

MedPage Today (1/27, Marshall, Salahi, 183K) publishes a transcript of an interview with NIH Director Francis Collins, MD, PhD. The interviewers mentioned Dr. Fauci recently implied he had thought of quitting the COVID-19 task force, and when asked about working with the Trump Administration, Collins said that "scientific decisions were sometimes overruled by political considerations." Collins added, "It's a little hard to tell this being still very early in the Biden administration exactly how all of the science efforts are going to be organized; but there's such a sense of encouragement that science is at the table." Collins referred to ACTIV, which he said "brought together, ultimately, 20 pharmaceutical companies, multiple NIH institutes, academics, the CDC, the FDA, the veterans administration, BARDA, the Department of Defense, all around the same table to say: 'Okay, how do we do some things that aren't happening right now?'"

Fauci: COVID Vaccine Rollout Should Prioritize People Of Color.

Axios (1/27, Chen, 1.26M) reports NIAID Director "Anthony Fauci highlighted the need to address racial disparities in the COVID-19 vaccination process, per an interview with The New England Journal of Medicine on Wednesday." Fauci said, "I think that's the one thing we really got to be careful of. We don't want in the beginning...most of the people who are getting it are otherwise, well, middle-class white people." Fauci added, "You really want to get it to the people who are really the most vulnerable...you don't want to have a situation where people who really are in need of it, because of where they are, where they live, what their economic status is, that they don't have access to the vaccine."

Fauci, Walensky Discuss COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout, Non-Essential Travel During CNN Town Hall.

During a CNN (1/27, 89.21M) town hall, CNN's Anderson Cooper and Dr. Sanjay Gupta discussed the COVID-19 vaccine rollout with NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci and CDC Director Rochelle Walensky. During the town hall, Fauci and Walensky advised against non-essential travel. Furthermore, Cooper and Gupta talked with Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, the chair of the COVID-19 health equity task force, about disparities among races amid the pandemic.

Additional Sources. CNN (1/28, 89.21M) reports Fauci and Walensky also discussed "guidance about mask-wearing, and why the CDC isn't recommending the public wear N95 masks."

Additional video of the town hall can be found here and here.

Dr. Fauci Says Covid Vaccines Can Be Easily Adapted To New Variants, Drugmakers Working On Boosters.

CNBC (1/27, Higgins-Dunn, 7.34M) reports "Pfizer and Moderna's current Covid-19 vaccines can be easily adapted to target new strains of the virus, something the drugmakers are already working on, White House health advisor Dr. Anthony Fauci said Wednesday." Novel "mRNA technology used to make the vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna makes it easy to adapt to the new strains, Fauci said." Fauci "added that the drugmakers are already working to make so-called 'booster' shots that will target the variant found in South Africa, which appears to be more problematic than the others."

Federal Agencies Will Study Covid Vaccine Effectiveness On 'Mutant' Strains, Fauci Says.

CNBC (1/27, 7.34M) reports several federal health agencies in the US "will collaborate to study how effective Covid-19 vaccines are against mutated strains of the virus that have been discovered in various parts of the world, White House health advisor Dr. Anthony Fauci said Wednesday." The CDC "is working to ramp up the country's capacity to conduct genomic sequencing and monitor for mutations of the virus, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said Wednesday at a White House Covid-19 briefing. Fauci added that the National Institutes of Health will work with the CDC to study the vaccines' effectiveness against new variants."

Additional Sources. Fox News (1/27, Hein, 23.99M) reports Fauci added that "researchers are exploring potential boosters or tweaks to the already-approved mRNA vaccines that would target specific mutants that are hampering the jabs ability to induce an antibody response, Dr. Anthony Fauci said."

Roll Call (1/27, 130K) also covers the story.

Fauci Defends Birx: 'She Had To Live In The White House'.

The Hill (1/27, Williams, 5.69M) reports NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "is defending former White House coronavirus response coordinator Deborah Birx amid scrutiny of her time under former President Trump." During "an interview with The Atlantic published Wednesday, Fauci, who unlike Birx is staying on in the new Biden administration, was asked whether she should have spoken out more forcefully against the former administration's COVID-19 response after she criticized it in an interview on CBS's 'Face the Nation' on Sunday." Fauci said, "It's a tough situation. I will defend her. Unlike the situation that the FDA [Food and Drug Administration] commissioner and the CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] director and I were in, she had to live in the White House."

Fauci Confident Vaccine Companies Ready For 'Mutant' Coronavirus Strains.

The Hill (1/27, Weixel, 5.69M) reports, "Federal health agencies are preparing for the possibility that the current COVID-19 vaccines might not be effective against future strains of the coronavirus, Anthony Fauci said Wednesday, but he has confidence that drug companies will be able to quickly change the formula." He said, "We are preparing, in anticipation that the virus will continue to evolve and may get to the point where it crosses the threshold that our vaccine is no longer effective as we want it to be." He made the comments during an event hosted by The Hill. Fauci "said the federally authorized vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna are effective against multiple strains that have been identified so far."

Fauci: 'Not Productive' To Rehash Trump Handling Of Pandemic: 'Let's Look Forward'.

Fox News (1/27, Rutz, 23.99M) reports, "Biden chief medical adviser Dr. Anthony Fauci expressed reluctance Wednesday to rehash Trump administration policy or second-guess coronavirus decision-making by governors like New York's Andrew Cuomo, telling Fox News in a wide-ranging interview 'let's look forward.'" In response to a question "about criticism from Biden officials of the Trump administration's handling of the virus," Fauci said discussing the past was "not productive." He is quoted as saying, "Right now, let's look forward about what President Biden has said, how we're going to get as many doses in as many people as we can. ... That's why he has his plan, which I want to emphasize, it's a floor, not a ceiling, to get 100 million doses into people in the first 100 days."

Virus Will Kill Many More, WH Projects As Briefings Resume.

The AP (1/27, Miller, Alonso-Zaldivar) reports President Biden's "administration launched its new level-with-America health briefings Wednesday with a projection that as many as 90,000 more in the U.S. will die from the coronavirus in the next four weeks – a sobering warning as the government strains to improve delivery and injection of vaccines." The article says this projection "served as a stark reminder of the brutal road ahead." CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky stated, "I know this is not news we all want to hear, but this is something we must say so we are all aware." Meanwhile, NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "said there was reason to be concerned about the impact of some coronavirus mutations on vaccines, but he also said scientists have plenty of options for adjustments to maintain effectiveness."

Additional Sources. The Hill (1/27, Samuels, 5.69M) reports Walensky said the CDC "predicts the country is on pace for between 479,000 and 514,000 COVID-19 deaths by Feb. 20." This "estimate is a more specific version of what Walensky said she expected during an interview with CBS earlier this month."

US News & World Report (1/27, Lardieri, 1.91M) and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution (1/27, Darnell, 1.46M) also cover the story.

Covid Cases Drop Most In U.S. West, But Relief May Be Brief.

Bloomberg (1/27, Querolo, 3.57M) reports that "in the span of two weeks, states in the U.S. West pushed down coronavirus case averages by 43%, outstripping the decline in other regions, which all have seen numbers retreat from peaks this month." Nearly every Western state "reported cases falling or flat Tuesday, and every region in the country has seen its seven-day average drop at least 20% since Jan. 12, according to data from the Covid Tracking Project." Some states, such as Oregon and California, "had numbers drop by more than a third in the course of a week."

Additional Sources. CNN (1/27, Hanna, 89.21M) reports "Covid-19 case and hospitalization numbers have been falling" in the US, but the country "still is at one of its worst spots of the coronavirus pandemic." Daily fatalities "are near a peak, and other daily stats still are stunningly high compared to where they'd been before a late 2020 surge." Some "experts say the US...has a chance to experience life a little more normally by early fall." NIAID Director "Anthony Fauci made that prediction last week, assuming 70% to 85% of the US population was vaccinated by end of summer."

NBC Nightly News (1/27, story 2, 1:35, Holt, 6M) reported that meanwhile, "a growing number of states" has identified more contagious coronavirus variants, and "the CDC projects the US could reach more than half a million deaths before the end of next month." According to NBC, the CDC says that by March, the UK COVID-19 variant "will be the most predominant strain in the country. Before the end of January, it has already been detected in more than half the nation." The broadcast added, "Alarmed more mutations from Brazil and South Africa could already be in the US, doctors say now is the time to double down on safety measures."

New Biden Health Care Orders Begin To Unspool Trump Policies.

The AP (1/28, Alonso-Zaldivar) reports President "Biden is set to take his first steps to reverse Trump administration health care policies." According to the AP, "the White House said Biden plans on Thursday to sign orders on a range of issues including getting more Americans covered and removing curbs on abortion counseling." One "concrete short-term impact will come from Biden reopening HealthCare.gov insurance markets as coverage has shrunk in the economic turmoil of the coronavirus pandemic."

Additional Sources. The Washington Post (1/27, Goldstein, 10.52M) reports "Biden plans to sign an executive order Thursday to reopen the Affordable Care Act's federal insurance marketplace for three months to give Americans who need coverage during the coronavirus pandemic a special chance to buy health plans." Based on "information released by the White House, previewing Biden's actions Thursday afternoon, HealthCare.gov, the online federal insurance exchange for people who do not have access to affordable health benefits through a job, will open from Feb. 15 to May 15."

Reuters (1/28, Hunnicutt) reports "the action was expected. Biden has vowed to shore up the healthcare.gov and other programs created under former President Barack Obama's sweeping 2010 Affordable Care Act."

Politico (1/28, Luthi, 6.73M) reports the Administration "is also expected to restore Obamacare marketing funds that the Trump administration had gutted, and it will soon begin the process of reversing the previous administration's changes to Medicaid."

CNN International (1/28, Luhby) reports Biden "wants agencies to review measures that make it more difficult to enroll in Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act and that reduce affordability or financial assistance, including for dependents."

NBC News (1/28, McCausland, 4.91M) reports the Administration "hopes to quickly help those uninsured in Georgia, as well as in 11 other states, by providing incentives to expand Medicaid. The efforts won't be easy, however: Some state leaders, like Gov. Brain Kemp last year, pursued a variation of Medicaid expansion pushed by the Trump administration – a version that undercuts the federal insurance program, implements work requirements and leaves hundreds of thousands of people without access to coverage." Former CMS Administrator Seema Verma and former HHS Secretary Alex Azar are mentioned.

Bloomberg (1/28, Cook, Hansard, Tozzi, 3.57M) reports "another directive Biden will issue Thursday will immediately rescind the so-called Mexico City Policy, which prohibits international non-profits from receiving U.S. funding if they provide abortion counseling or referrals."

NPR (1/28, Diaz, 3.69M) similarly reports Biden's "order aims 'to protect and expand access to comprehensive reproductive health care' by rescinding the Mexico City Policy, also known as the 'global gag rule.' This policy, reinstated and expanded by the Trump administration, bars international non-governmental organizations that provide abortion counseling or referrals from receiving U.S. funding."

USA Today (1/28, Groppe, 12.7M) reports NIAID Director Anthony Fauci "told the World Health Organization last week that the United States will revoke the Mexico City Policy...'as part of his broader commitment to protect women's health and advance gender equality at home and around the world.'"

CNN (1/28, Kelly, Gaouette, 89.21M) reports "the memorandum will also direct the Health and Human Services Department to immediately move to consider rescinding the Trump administration rule blocking health care providers in the federally funded Title X family planning program from referring patients for abortions."

The Hill (1/28, Hellmann, 5.69M) reports the White House said, "As we continue to battle COVID-19, it is even more critical that Americans have meaningful access to affordable care."

Fox News (1/27, Stimson, 23.99M) also reports.

All 50 States Experiencing Vaccine Shortages.

NBC Nightly News (1/27, lead story, 3:00, Holt, 6M) reported in its lead story, "Like a game of chance, Americans are finding success and maddening disappointment in securing COVID-19 vaccine shots, with no rhyme or reason. The increased doses the Biden administration has promised will enter the system are still weeks away." All 50 states say they do not have "enough doses to meet demand, and in many cases...they have less vaccines now than a few weeks ago." Andy Slavitt, White House Senior Adviser For COVID-19 Response, said, "It will be months before everyone who wants a vaccine can get one," adding, "We are passing doses directly along to states, very much in real time as they order them." Meanwhile, NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci addressed the efficacy of current vaccines against coronavirus variants, saying, "It still is well within the cushion of protection. So you can diminish the vaccine induced antibody efficacy by a few fold, and still be well within the protective range of the vaccine."

Time To Double Or Upgrade Masks As Coronavirus Variants Emerge, Experts Say.

The Washington Post (1/27, Nirappil, 10.52M) reports, "The discovery of highly transmissible coronavirus variants in the United States has public health experts urging Americans to upgrade the simple cloth masks that have become a staple shield during the pandemic." The change "can be as simple as slapping a second mask over the one you already wear, or better yet, donning a fabric mask on top of a surgical mask." Some experts "say it is time to buy the highest-quality KN95 or N95 masks that officials hoping to reserve supplies for health-care workers have long discouraged Americans from purchasing." Former CDC Director Tom Frieden said, "The existence of more-transmissible viruses emphasizes the [importance] of us upping our game and doing not more of the same but better of the same." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci "touted double-masking during a Monday appearance on the 'Today' show." Former NIH official David Abrams is quoted.

Biden's First Big Covid Test: Keeping Parents Of School Kids From Losing It.

Politico (1/27, Cadelago, Stratford, 6.73M) reports President "Biden's vow to reopen most schools during his first 100 days is crashing into demands of one of his party's most powerful constituencies: teachers' unions." The friction is leading to "an early test for the Democratic Party's commitment to following the advice of scientists when it comes to the coronavirus pandemic." The White House is trying "to navigate between a growing body of science indicating that long-held fears of reopening schools may be overblown with demands from teachers for more funding and health supplies before returning to the classroom." Now, Republican "operatives are confident they can drive a wedge between Biden, teachers and parents who are exhausted by the months of school closures." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci "is set to hold a fireside chat with" teachers' "union officials on Thursday night to discuss vaccine rollout."

Biden Advisers Say U.S. Will Remain Vulnerable To Covid Unless Congress Acts.

The New York Times (1/27, Stolberg, 20.6M) reports on Wednesday, Jeffrey D. Zients, the Biden Administration's coronavirus czar, said the US "was woefully behind other nations in tracking potentially dangerous variants of the virus, and used the first White House public health briefing to issue a stark warning that Americans will remain vulnerable to the deadly pandemic unless Congress acts." He said, "We are 43rd in the world in genomic sequencing – totally unacceptable." Zients later corrected himself, saying the US was 32nd. The article says CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky echoed Zients' pleas for more funding. Meanwhile, NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "said the National Institutes of Health was working with the C.D.C. on research aimed at adapting vaccines so that they 'have on the ability to neutralize these mutants.'"

Biden's First Three Steps To Getting Vaccines To Everyone.

TIME (1/27, Park, 18.1M) highlights the first three major steps President Biden has take to improve COVID-19 vaccine distribution. These include raising "minimum weekly shipments of vaccines to states to 10 million doses, from the current 8.6 million," guaranteeing "these shipment numbers for the next three weeks, which allows states to plan out for the next month how many people they can vaccinate," and acquiring "200 million additional doses of vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech," thus "ensuring the government has enough to inoculate the entire American public with two doses by the end of the summer – whether or not any other vaccines are approved in the interim." The piece also discusses the Administration's first COVID-19 briefing in which NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci and CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky participated.

White House Exploring Tapping Drugmakers To Produce Rivals' Vaccines.

Reuters (1/27, Spalding) reports that on Wednesday, the White House COVID-19 response team suggested "drug manufacturers who are not making vaccines may be tapped to produce Pfizer's or Moderna's vaccines under the Defense Production Act. 'I don't want to talk about specific names but I will say that we are exploring every possible option,' Andy Slavitt, senior advisor to the White House's COVID-19 response team, told a media briefing when asked whether the Biden administration might force one drug maker to produce another's vaccine."

Additional Source. The Washington Times (1/27, Howell, 626K) reports "Slavitt said they are looking at wielding the Defense Production Act to compel production but swiftly tempered expectations, saying it isn't easy to retrofit other companies' operations." The article mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

AstraZeneca To Test If Longer Wait Between Vaccine Doses Works Better.

Bloomberg (1/27, Ring, 3.57M) reports, "AstraZeneca Plc plans to conduct a global study on the optimal interval between the two doses of its Covid-19 vaccine as questions linger over how to elicit the best protection for the greatest number of people." Specifically, "the new trial will investigate a two-month gap between shots to determine whether it can provide better efficacy, Chief Executive Pascal Soriot told a group of European newspapers Tuesday." The article adds, "Results are likely in March, according to" NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, who "spoke Wednesday at a press briefing with members of President Joe Biden's Covid-19 response team."

COVID-19 Variant First Identified In U.K. Now Found In 26 States, Says CDC Director.

CBS News (1/27, McNamara, 5.39M) reports on Wednesday, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said "a COVID-19 variant first detected in the United Kingdom has now been found in 26 states. The variant appears to be 50% more contagious than other strains of the virus." Another strain "first identified in South Africa, that has shown some resistance to antibodies, has not been identified stateside, according to...Walensky, who spoke with other health officials Wednesday about the federal response to the coronavirus pandemic." NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "said a Phase 3 Johnson & Johnson vaccine study is looking at its effectiveness against the variant found in South Africa, which will be useful if the variant ever arrives in the U.S."

Additional Source. McClatchy (1/27, Wilner, 29K) also covers the story.

Coronavirus Czar Says Every Effort Is Being Made To Accelerate COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution As The US Deals With A National Emergency.

The CBS Evening News (1/27, lead story, 3:40, O'Donnell, 6.92M) reported that "President Biden's coronavirus czar says the country is in a national emergency and everything is on the table when it comes to speeding up the production and distribution of vaccine. Experts say with the coronavirus now mutating into even more contagious strains, the only way to stop another surge in infections is to vaccinate enough Americans to stop the ability for the virus to mutate. The head of the CDC now says the US has more than 300 cases of the highly contagious new strain first found in the UK which is now spreading like wildfire across Europe." In addition, physicians say it "is worrisome because strains that spread easily will lead to more Americans getting infected and dying." NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci was show saying, "We have to be concerned, looking forward at what the further evolution of this might be."

How Many Variants Of The Coronavirus Are There?

The AP (1/28, Renault) reports on the emergence of three new coronavirus variants that have health experts concerned. The article adds that a variant discovered in the UK late in 2020 "might become dominant in the U.S. by March, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention." However, there "are ways to adjust vaccines and treatments to maintain their effectiveness, said" NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Oklahoma Seeking To Return $2M Worth Of Hydroxychloroquine.

The AP (1/27) reports that the Oklahoma attorney general's office "is attempting to return $2 million worth of a malaria drug once touted by former President Donald Trump as an effective treatment for COVID-19, a spokesman said Wednesday." Alex Gerszewski, "a spokesman for Attorney General Mike Hunter, said Hunter is attempting to negotiate a return of the 1.2 million hydroxychloroquine pills Oklahoma acquired in April from a

California-based supplier, FFF Enterprises." He "said the office was acting on a request from the Oklahoma State Department of Health, which authorized the purchase."

Additional Sources. CNN (1/27, Alonso, 89.21M) reports that in July, the FDA "revoked an emergency use authorization for hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine to treat Covid-19. The agency now says hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine have not been shown to be safe and effective for treating or preventing Covid-19."

The Washington Examiner (1/27, Deese, 888K) reports NIAID Director Anthony Fauci "has said there is no definitive medical evidence to prove the anti-malarial drug is an effective treatment against COVID-19."

The Hill (1/27, Choi, 5.69M) also reports.

At First Coronavirus Briefing, White House Acknowledges Vaccinations Will Take Months.

The Washington Post (1/27, Goldstein, Sun, 10.52M) reports on Wednesday, the "White House acknowledged...that most Americans will need to wait months to get vaccinated, as top officials launched regular briefings on their coronavirus response by seeking to illustrate their fidelity to science and transparency." The mass vaccination campaign against COVID-19, "the most ambitious in the nation's history, is constrained by both the vaccine supply and the ability to administer shots." According to Jeff Zients, President Biden's coordinator of the federal vaccine response, "the White House is directing the Department of Health and Human Services to use a law, called the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act, or PREP, that shields health-care workers from most legal liability under emergency circumstances." This law is being amended to "encourage retired doctors and nurses to administer coronavirus vaccine doses." In addition, licensed physicians and nurses will be able to administer shots in all states. The article mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Additional Sources. CNN (1/27, Klein, Fox, Tinker, 89.21M) reports, "Andy Slavitt, senior adviser to the White House Covid-19 response team, said it will be 'months before everyone who wants a vaccine will be able to get one.'"

The Hill (1/27, Weixel, 5.69M) reports Slavitt also said, "I want to level with the public that we're facing two constraining factors." These include "getting enough supply quickly enough, and" administering "the vaccines quickly once they're produced and sent out to the sites." He added, "'I don't want you to hear that just because they will be manufactured and produced by a certain date, that is the same thing as' getting the vaccine into people's arms."

Among other news outlets covering the story are Forbes (1/27, Brewster, 10.33M), Modern Healthcare (1/27, Johnson, Subscription Publication, 215K) and FierceHealthcare (1/27, King, 150K).

Remdesivir, Given To Half Of Hospitalized Covid Patients In U.S., Is Big Win For Gilead.

Kaiser Health News (1/27, Tribble) reports that Gilead Sciences' remdesivir has found success as a treatment for patients with COVID-19, after failing to treat patients with hepatitis C or Ebola. NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci appears to have correctly predicted that remdesivir would become the "standard of care" for treating COVID-19 as physicians "with no other FDA-approved treatment options are now prescribing remdesivir to half the covid patients in U.S. hospitals." However, some have argued that there is insufficient evidence supporting this use of the drug, and others have criticized Gilead over the price of the drug. While physicians "rationed the drug, politicians and advocates said U.S. taxpayers had invested enough in remdesivir's development to merit a lower price."

How Anthony Fauci Survived Donald Trump.

During an interview with The Atlantic (1/27, Nicholas, 3.53M), NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci discussed how he survived under President Trump, who once called him "a disaster." Fauci said, "The thing that got me through it was, I did not let that bother me. ... People cannot believe that. But it's true. The problem is so enormous. People's lives are at stake. I'm a physician. I'm a scientist. I'm a public-health expert. I know what I need to do. All that other stuff is just a distraction. Quite frankly, it's bulls**t."

Additional Source. HuffPost (1/27, Blum, 363K) reports that during the interview, Fauci said, "With every other president, whether they were conservative, moderate, or liberal, the guidepost for everything was a deep respect for science. ... That was always the case. When I got involved with Trump, it went into a different world, the likes of which I had not experienced." He also said about Trump, "... There was something about our commonality of being New Yorkers that we developed this strange relationship, where we really liked each other." Regarding the Trump campaign misrepresenting his comments in a political ad, Fauci stated, "I didn't tell them to back off. ... That wasn't my style. My style was to say – to get a little Brooklyn-ite – 'What is this bulls**t that you people are doing?' I just made it very clear that I didn't like it.'"

Becerra Confirmation Delay Is Hobbling The Fight Against COVID-19: Sebelius And Shalala.

In an opinion piece for USA Today (1/28, 12.7M), former HHS Secretaries Kathleen Sebelius and Donna Shalala write that "unfortunately, there are some in the Senate who are delaying the confirmation process for Biden's nominee for Health and Human Services secretary, California Attorney General Xavier Becerra." They say "HHS plays the central role in coordinating the national response to health crises like" the pandemic, and oversees the CDC, the FDA, and the NIH. The authors conclude, "Without the secretary, we will face a backlog that will slow our national response to this crisis, upend progress already being made, and prevent action when it is needed most. The Senate should move on this nomination as soon as possible and put in place this qualified nominee who can help keep us safe and healthy, end this crisis, and get us back to our lives." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci is mentioned.

Joe Biden's Magic COVID Plan Turns Out To Be More Of The Same.

In an opinion piece for the New York Post (1/27, Markowicz, 7.45M), columnist Karol Markowicz says that the Biden Administration has "no magic plan" to curb the spread of COVID-19. Markowicz asserts that "the Biden team planted a story with CNN that alleged they were given no vaccine plan from the Trump administration." However, NIAID Director "Anthony Fauci disputed that report." Markowicz asks the press if it can "get the president to stop using the last administration as a foil? We hired Joe Biden not to look backward and say what he coulda, woulda done but to lead. It's time for the new president to step up and do that."

Biden Needs To Set Even More Ambitious Vaccination Goals.

Jonah Goldberg, editor-in-chief of The Dispatch and the host of The Remnant podcast, writes in the Baltimore Sun (1/27, 629K) that President Biden set his initial goal for COVID-19 vaccine distribution "way too low." Therefore, "it was good news Monday, that Mr. Biden relented and raised the target to 1.5 million vaccinations per day. But he's still playing catch-up with facts on the ground in order to keep expectations in check." Goldberg adds that "Biden says he wants the federal government to respond to this crisis as if it were a war. ... We haven't

fully mobilized the country for war since WWII, and if that's the model, the Biden administration is falling far short of the mark." He mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

'What Is This Bull----': Fauci Explains How He Challenged Trump And His People On COVID-19.

Jake Lahut writes for Business Insider (1/27, 2.74M) that NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "spoke openly in a new interview about how he dealt with confrontations during his time working with the Trump White House on the coronavirus." During "a forthright interview with The Atlantic, Fauci said he leaned on his Brooklyn roots when the former president or his aides would misconstrue what he was saying about the virus and the administration's response."

Fauci Said 'Macho Guy' Trump Saw Masks As A 'Sign Of Weakness' And Many Americans Followed His Lead.

John Haltiwanger writes for Business Insider (1/27, 2.74M) that NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "in a new interview with the Atlantic said that former President Donald Trump's views on masculinity were likely behind his reluctance to wear a mask in public and set an example for the country amid the COVID-19 pandemic." Fauci said Trump is "a pretty macho guy. ... It's almost like it diminishes one's manhood to wear a mask. To him, a mask was a sign of weakness. The unfortunate aspect of this is that a lot of people in the country took that on as a mantra. That's the problem."

The Disinformation Pandemic Is Real. Fighting It Will Require Compassion.

James West writes for Mother Jones (1/27, 889K) that President Trump is no longer in office, however, "assessing the wreckage wrought by his lies has only just begun. Emerging, battered, from a year advising the former president, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, and Dr. Deborah Birx, the former coronavirus taskforce coordinator, both agree: Trump's embrace of disinformation and chaos made the pandemic worse." West adds, "The damage done by anti-science messaging – along with self-delusion, denial, and happy talk – can't be underestimated, says Dr. Seema Yasmin, an Emmy Award-winning journalist, epidemiologist, and author of the new book, Viral BS. It amounts to a pandemic within a pandemic."

Biden Team Searches For Ways To Make More COVID Vaccines And PPE.

Josh Kovensky writes for Talking Points Memo (1/27, 77K) that "with the effort to vaccinate the country running up against capacity constraints, the Biden administration is searching for ways to boost the country's ability to produce and deliver large quantities of the two COVID-19 vaccines currently on the market." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

A New Biden Executive Order Promises To 'Restore Scientific Integrity' To The US Government In A Slapdown Of The Trump White House.

Mia Jankowicz writes for Business Insider (1/27, 2.74M) that President Biden was scheduled to "sign an executive order on Wednesday promising 'restore scientific integrity' to the US government's workings, in an apparent rebuke to former President Donald Trump." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

How To Fix The Incentives In Cancer Research.

In an episode of Freakonomics Radio on its site, the Freakonomics (1/27, Dubner) interviewed NCI Director Ned Sharpless, MD, about how to align institutions to gain knowledge of "the basic biology of cancer" with a new clinical trial platform. Asked how to fix clinical trials, Sharpless said that he spends "a lot of time worrying about how we can prioritize funding to make sure we always fund the best science." Sharpless describes how "the cardiology paradigm," which calls for small changes over large randomized trials, "breaks down pretty quickly" in cancer. Sharpless said, "This sort of fragmentation from the cardiology paradigm, large randomized trials to these smaller, nimble sometimes unrandomized trials, has been a recurring theme in oncology." Freakonomics also interviewed former FDA Commissioner Peggy Hamburg.

Group Wants Louisiana University Fined For 3 Monkey Deaths.

The AP (1/27) reports the Ohio-based Stop Animal Exploitation Now group, which opposed experiments involving animals, "says a Louisiana university should be fined $30,000 because heat stroke apparently killed three research monkeys in different outdoor cages on the same day last summer." However, the University of Louisiana "took timely and appropriate action following the deaths Aug. 5, which were promptly reported by phone a day afterward and in a letter Aug. 26, wrote Brent C. Morse, compliance oversight director for the Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare in the National Institutes of Health."

Biden Appoints Rear Admiral Susan Orsega As Acting Surgeon General.

Healthcare IT News (1/27, Jercich, 2K) reports HHS' website indicates President Biden has selected "Susan Orsega to serve as acting surgeon general." The article says, "Orsega, who has served as the director of commissioned corps headquarters at the Office of the Surgeon General since March 2019, will be among a handful of nurses appointed to fill the role of surgeon general." The piece adds that "Orsega worked at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases of the National Institutes of Health before being named chief nurse officer of the USPHS in 2016."

'Sharp Decline' In COVID Cases Among L.A. Firefighters After Vaccinations.

The Los Angeles Times (1/27, Smith, Welsh, 3.37M) reports "the number of Los Angeles firefighters testing positive for the coronavirus has dropped significantly since the city fire agency began offering its members vaccinations, Fire Chief Ralph Terrazas said in a memo to firefighters this week." In a Tuesday memo, Terrazas "said the LAFD has seen a 'sharp decline' in cases since firefighters started getting the shots on Dec. 28." A chart "shows that the LAFD was averaging more than 15 new cases per day before the vaccination program. The number soon plummeted. In the most recent week, the department has averaged fewer than five new cases per day." Terrazas "wrote that the doses developed by Moderna and the National Institutes of Health have caused very few cases of severe allergic reaction during its initial rollout across the country."

Allocation Of NIH Funding Demonstrates 'Great Stability' Over Time.

Healio (1/27, Ernst, 40K) reports, "Researchers observed a 'remarkably similar' allocation of NIH funding for 46 diseases in multiple body systems, including neurological and cardiovascular diseases, in 2019 compared with 2008 despite changing patterns in burden of disease." The researchers found that "funding for Alzheimer's

disease and dementia increased the most," getting "an estimated $1.8 billion more in 2019 compared with 2008." The findings (1/4) were published in JAMA Network Open.

Aspirin Use Tied To Longer Bladder, Breast Cancer Survival.

HealthDay (1/27, 11K) reports, "Aspirin use may improve survival for bladder and breast cancer, according to a study published online Jan. 15 in JAMA Network Open." In their research, "Holli A. Loomans-Kropp, Ph.D., M.P.H., from the National Cancer Institute in Rockville, Maryland, and colleagues investigated the association of aspirin use with the risk for developing new cancers, as well as site-specific cancer-associated survival for bladder, breast, esophageal, gastric, pancreatic, and uterine cancers." The findings indicate "aspirin use at least three times/week was associated with increased survival among patients with" breast and bladder cancers.

Small Cell Lung Cancer Study Uncovers Disease-Associated Germline Mutations.

GenomeWeb (1/27, Rizk) reports, in a paywalled article, "Researchers at the National Cancer Institute, Georgetown University, and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center have determined that small cell lung cancer (SCLC), a disease which is currently thought to result almost entirely from exposure to tobacco, may have an inherited predisposition." These "findings could result in the development of therapies that target the mutated genes."

Bill Limiting Opioid Prescriptions For Hurt Workers Passes North Dakota House.

The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead (ND) (1/27, Turley, 49K) reports, "The North Dakota House of Representatives has passed a bill that would limit how many opioid-based painkillers injured workers can receive in a single prescription." The proposal, which "will now go onto the Senate when the chambers exchange legislation next month," limits "the opioids prescribed to workers through North Dakota Workforce Safety and Insurance to 90 'morphine milligram equivalents' per day." The article adds, "Prescriptions would also be limited to seven days in the first 30 days of treatment, and patients would have to travel to their medical provider in-person to renew a prescription." The article mentions the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Five Urgent Public Health Policies To Combat The Mental Health Effects Of COVID-19.

Cindy B. Veldhuis, Elizabeth Stuart and M. Daniele Fallin write for Health Affairs (1/27, 35K) that the "development and dissemination of effective COVID-19 vaccines gives us hope for an end to the pandemic that has upended our lives." However, "vaccines will not end the mental health crisis that is emerging and likely worsening, particularly during the isolating winter months." The authors go on to discuss several urgent public health policies which can help to fight the mental health impact of COVID-19. The piece mentions the NIH.

HHS Publishes Strategy To Align AI Efforts.

Modern Healthcare (1/27, Cohen, Subscription Publication, 215K) reports HHS "published an artificial-intelligence strategy outlining the department's approach to using and regulating AI, which includes setting up an HHS AI Council to spearhead its efforts." The strategy "is the latest sign of HHS ramping up its AI focus." The article adds that in December, HHS "named Oki Mek, formerly a senior adviser to the HHS chief information officer, its first-ever chief artificial intelligence officer." The piece mentions the FDA and NIH.

Additional Source. ExecutiveGov (1/27, Edwards) also covers the story.

Existing Drugs Could Help Treat Covid-19. How Do We Know When To Use Them?

In an opinion in the Washington Post (1/27, Klausner, 10.52M), Jeffrey Klausner, a professor of epidemiology at the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health, writes that "potentially reliable medications" to treat COVID-19 "are available already – and it's time to start trying to use them, even if that means loosening the standards for deciding whether a drug works to use off-label to treat the coronavirus." For example, Klausner says, "Ivermectin, a widely available, inexpensive medication used to treat parasitic infections in both humans and animals, was found to have antiviral activity against SARS-CoV-2, prompting study by investigators." However, he adds, "The results have been conflicting, leading the National Institutes of Health Covid-19 Treatment Guidelines group not to advise for or against routine use and recommending only further study."

Ohio State Study Proposes Using Hard Candy To Test For COVID-19 Symptoms.

The Cincinnati Enquirer (1/27, Brookbank, 223K) reports, "The Ohio State University announced that a research team has received funding from the National Institutes of Health to develop easy-to-deploy strategies that can identify people who are potentially infected with COVID-19." The "researchers at OSU are proposing using hard candies to help detect probable positive cases in otherwise asymptomatic people." Officials said, "Participants will be asked to sniff and consume a piece of hard candy once per day and log into an app to report what they smell and taste – not only by identifying the flavor, but also rating its intensity. If they report a sudden drop in either sense, they'll receive a message that they should quarantine and get a COVID-19 test."

New Project Trains MHealth On Medication Adherence For Transplant Patients.

mHealth Intelligence (1/27, Wicklund) reports, "Researchers at three health systems will soon be launching a telehealth study to determine whether transplant patients can improve their medication management through an mHealth app." The University of Miami, University of Virginia and Johns Hopkins University "will be taking part in the pilot program, funded by a $1.5 million grant from the National Institutes of Health's National Institute on Diabetes and Digestives and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK)." Their "study will evaluate whether care providers can use video-based Directly Observed Therapy to ensure that kidney and liver transplant patients are taking their medications when they should."

Health & Medical News

White House Official Says US Will Need 500M Doses To Vaccinate Everyone Aged 16 And Older Against Coronavirus.

Bloomberg (1/27, Shah, Griffin, 3.57M) reports Andy Slavitt, the White House senior adviser for COVID-19 response, said the US will need "500 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine to fully inoculate everyone 16 and older." Slavitt explained that the "estimate assumes a two-dose regimen and reflects only the vaccines that are currently on the market." He added, "We are not counting on things that are not in existence today."

Effort Underway To Get About 10,000 Service Members To Help With COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution.

ABC World News Tonight (1/27, story 2, 0:25, Muir, 7.45M) reported that there is an "effort under way to try to get thousands of service members to help with vaccinations across the country." ABC (Alex Perez) added, "As many as 10,000 service members could be asked to help with administering the vaccine at 100 sites across the country. The National Guard already helping with the vaccine in more than 30 states."

Lawmakers Seeking Answers About COVID-19 Outbreak Among National Guard Deployed To Capitol.

Politico (1/27, Seligman, Desiderio, 6.73M) reports, "Frustrated lawmakers on Wednesday demanded a better accounting of the scope of a Covid outbreak among the National Guard members deployed to the Capitol, and answers on why thousands of troops are being forced to remain on duty in Washington, D.C., through March for an unspecified threat." On Monday, defense officials said almost "200 out of the 25,000 troops had tested positive for the virus," however, "the final count will likely be much higher, as recent batches of mass testing have come back 10-15 percent positive, POLITICO reported Tuesday." Rep. Michael Waltz (R-FL) told Politico he is dissatisfied "with the information the Pentagon has provided on the Covid outbreak."

Scott Atlas "Shocked" That Birx Believed She Should Be The Sole Source Of COVID-19 Information For Trump.

Fox News (1/27, Chamberlain, 23.99M) reports that on Tuesday, former White House coronavirus adviser Dr. Scott Atlas appeared on "The Ingraham Angle" in order "to respond to former White House coronavirus response coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx's claim that he provided former President Trump with 'parallel data streams' about the pandemic." Atlas said, "I'm shocked to hear anyone that thinks that they own a monopoly or should be the sole purveyor of information to the president."

Many Americans Still Unable To Purchase N95 Masks Because Retailers Have Limited Supplies.

NPR (1/27, Noguchi, 3.69M) reports many people are still not "able to buy N95 masks, because the supply available to retailers remains very limited." The CDC website says, "N-95 respirators should not be used [by the general public] because they should be conserved for healthcare personnel." The article says "consumer demand for N95s and medical-grade, surgical-style masks keeps growing as the Biden administration emphasizes the use of masks by the public to slow the spread of the coronavirus -- especially as new variants of it spread rapidly around the world."

MGMA Wants Biden Administration To Include Medical Groups In Future COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Plans.

FierceHealthcare (1/27, Reed, 150K) reports, "Medical practices are largely being left out of the COVID-19 vaccine efforts, a survey from the Medical Group Management Association (MGMA) found." The analysis, "which reflected responses from 403 medical group practices, showed 85% of independent practices actively seeking the COVID-19 vaccine for their patients received some as of Jan. 21-24. Nearly half (45%) of hospital- or health system-owned practices seeking vaccines still hadn't gotten any." Most of the practices which "have gotten the vaccine (54%) say they only received enough to vaccinate 1% or less of their patients." On Tuesday, MGMA

wrote to the Biden Administration and requested that medical group practices be included in future COVID-19 vaccine distribution plans.

Krugman: Stimulus Checks Should Be In Addition To Other COVID-19 Aid, Not An Alternative.

Paul Krugman writes in his New York Times (1/27, 20.6M) column that the "main purpose" of President Biden's proposed COVID-19 relief plan "isn't stimulus, it's disaster relief." Its "goal is to help those parts of our society hit hard by the constrained economy to make it through with minimum damage." Krugman adds that the "controversial part" is the $1,400 payments, "many of which would go to Americans who are doing OK. And the critics are right to say that many of those who would receive payment wouldn't need the money." But they are wrong "in assuming that the stimulus checks...are in competition with the other parts of the package. ... Given the economic and political situation we're in, stimulus checks are an 'and,' not an 'or.'"

Commentary Says Biden Administration Must Take Steps To Ensure COVID-19 Vaccine Is Not Wasted.

Rocco J. Perla, Lloyd Provost , Rebecca Onie, and Gareth Parry write in US News & World Report (1/27, 1.91M) that the US needs more COVID-19 vaccine doses for its population, and it must ensure that doses are not being wasted, as some reports have indicated. The authors say, "Health care and public health leaders have been here before, and have used quality-improvement principles to tackle exactly this type of problem at a national level in the form of learning networks designed to rapidly identify, curate and share best practices. As President Joe Biden's COVID-19 Response Team works to reach and even exceed the goal of 100 million shots in 100 days, they must adopt some version of a learning network as part of their outreach to governors, state public health officials, immunization managers and local leaders."

"Unusually Low" Flu Activity Diminishes Fears Of "Twindemic" Amid COVID-19 Pandemic.

US News & World Report (1/27, Smith-Schoenwalder, 1.91M) reports US data indicate "flu activity is currently 'unusually low,' diminishing – but not eliminating – fears that a severe flu season combined with the coronavirus pandemic could lead to a 'twindemic.'" The CDC "has documented over 1,100 cases of the flu so far." Although "some mild cases are likely going undiagnosed, nearly every state is experiencing 'minimal' flu activity, according to the agency."

Alabama Detects First Three Cases Of UK COVID-19 Variant In State.

The AP (1/27, Chandler) reports "the more highly transmissible COVID-19 variant first detected in the United Kingdom has infected three people in Alabama, state health officials said Wednesday." The coronavirus "variant was found in two children and one adult, the state heath department said in a statement." Two cases of the variant "are in Montgomery County and one is in Jefferson, the statement said."

Two People In Kenton County, Kentucky Contract UK Coronavirus Variant.

The Louisville (KY) Courier-Journal (1/27, Ladd, 554K) reports two people in Kenton County, Kentucky "have the new coronavirus variant from the United Kingdom, Dr. Steven Stack said Wednesday." The two infections "were first announced Tuesday, but it wasn't immediately known where the two people were from." Gov. Andy Beshear

(D) "said Wednesday they're 'doing OK' and neither is hospitalized, but didn't answer if the two were connected or had traveled outside the country."

Order Of Nuns In Western Indiana Facing COVID-19 Outbreak.

The AP (1/27) reports "a western Indiana order of nuns is facing a COVID-19 outbreak that has killed two sisters and two residents at a long-term care unit on the order's campus, a spokesman says." The exact "number of COVID-19 cases at the Sisters of Providence of St. Mary-of-the-Woods was not available Wednesday, said spokesman Jason Moon." However, "all sisters and residents in long-term care at Providence Health Care who have tested positive are in isolation, he told the Tribune-Star."

CDC Does Not Know If New Variants Of SARS-CoV-2 Are Causing More Cases Of MIS-C.

CNN (1/27, Christensen, 89.21M) reports the CDC "said Wednesday it does not know if the new Covid-19 variants are causing more cases of a rare complication in children called multisystem inflammatory syndrome." MIS-C "can cause heart damage," and "typically shows up about three weeks after a child has been infected." MIS-C can occur in children who had asymptomatic infections.

NBC Nightly News (1/27, story 3, 1:35, Holt, 6M) reported physicians "are seeing a new spike in cases" of MIS-C, "and they're worried about what the next few weeks will bring." MIS-C has "killed dozens of children and is now in 47 states, with cases spiking following a rise in COVID after the holidays."

Administration Yet To Announce Deals To Ramp Up COVID-19 Supplies Despite Officials Touting Use Of Defense Production Act.

CNN (1/27, Murray, 89.21M) reports "the Biden administration has repeatedly touted its plans to aggressively use the Defense Production Act as it combats the coronavirus pandemic, but behind the scenes, a slower, more painstaking effort is underway." According to CNN, "the more cautious and contemplative effort means the new administration has yet to announce any new deals in its early days to ramp up supplies related to Covid-19 vaccine production, testing or personal protective equipment – even as officials tout the use of the law." White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Wednesday, "It was invoked, and it means our work is ongoing with companies to ensure that we are expediting the manufacturing of materials to ensure that we can get 100 million shots in the arms of Americans."

Columnist: US May Be Passing Darkest Hour Of Pandemic, But Calamity Could Still Lie Ahead.

Columnist Leana Wen writes in the Washington Post (1/27, 10.52M) that while "January has been the deadliest month thus far, some models project that the worst may soon be behind us, with warmer months on the way and vaccinations picking up speed. This is the best-case scenario. But a much more ominous scenario looms, too." Wen asks what would occur "if the emerging covid-19 variants gain traction in the United States." There "could be a catastrophic surge far surpassing anything we've seen to date," and "activities that are relatively safe now would become higher risk." This "worst-case scenario," Wen argues, "makes the race to vaccinate even more pressing." While the country "could be passing our darkest hour...calamity could also still lie ahead. Once again, as it has been throughout the pandemic, what happens next is up to us."

South Carolina Legislators Trying To Override Health Board On COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Plan.

The AP (1/27, Liu) reports "South Carolina lawmakers are vying to override the Department of Health and Environmental Control's board on an allocation plan meant to equitably distribute the state's limited coronavirus vaccine supply." On Wednesday, "the House gave key approval...to the measure, part of a bill to direct up to $208 million in state surplus funds to bolster the state's vaccine rollout." The legislators' proposal "would direct the health department, DHEC, to allocate limited vaccine supplies across the state's four regions on a per capita basis, requiring it to take into account factors such as a region's rural and underserved areas, impoverished populations and how many elderly residents it has."

Oregon Health Workers Inject Stranded Drivers With COVID-19 Vaccine Amid Snowstorm.

The AP (1/27) reports "Oregon health workers who got stuck in a snowstorm on their way back from a COVID-19 vaccination event went car to car injecting stranded drivers before several of the doses expired." On Facebook, "Josephine County Public Health said...the 'impromptu vaccine clinic' took place after about 20 employees were stopped in traffic on a highway after a vaccination clinic." Six vaccine doses "were getting close to expiring so the workers decided to offer them to other stranded drivers."

The New York Post (1/27, Lapin, 7.45M) also reports on the story.

NPR Interviews California Surgeon General As She Heads The State's COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution System Revamp Effort.

NPR (1/27, Westervelt, 3.69M) reports "California's muddled county-based coronavirus vaccine distribution system has stoked confusion, frustration and angst for citizens across" the state. The state's "in-progress revamp" of the system "includes the launch of a statewide vaccine portal next month and bringing in an as-yet unnamed third-party administrator to help fix a jumbled system that basically has each of the state's 58 counties running its own vaccine program." In an interview, "NPR's Eric Westervelt spoke with the woman helping to lead the revamp effort, California's Surgeon General Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, about vaccine equity, transparency, and the distribution makeover underway." NPR provides a transcript of the "interview highlights."

North Dakota Raises Occupancy Limits For Restaurants, Bars.

The AP (1/27) reports that on Wednesday, North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum (R) "lowered the statewide risk level for the coronavirus, increasing the occupancy limits for bars, restaurants and other food service establishments." According to the AP, "a low risk level increased occupancy limits at bars and restaurants from 65% of the establishment's licensed capacity up to 200 patrons and to 80% of licensed capacity up to 300 patrons, with social distancing." Face masks "are strongly recommended or required."

Michigan House Republicans' COVID-19 Relief Proposal Would Block State From Making Decisions On Stopping In-Person Instruction.

The Detroit News (1/27, Mauger, LeBlanc, 1.16M) reports "a COVID-19 relief plan introduced by Michigan House Republicans on Wednesday aims to block Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's administration from making future decisions to stop in-person instruction and school sports." The plan "ties $2.1 billion in education funding to the approval of

a law that shifts the power to issue orders affecting in-person learning and sports away from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, according to a press release." Under the plan, "local health departments would have the authority to make the decisions."

Michigan Governor Says COVID-19 Vaccine Supply, Allocation Will Be Improved In State Of The State Address.

The Detroit Free Press (1/27, Boucher, 2.16M) reports "families can feed their children, workers can return to" their jobs, "and people can start to gather with those...they love when everyone can feel safe and be healthy, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer stressed in her 2021 State of the State address." However, "that cannot happen on a wide enough scale until the majority of Michigan adults are vaccinated [against COVID-19], Whitmer said Wednesday evening." Whitmer said, "I know people are anxious and ready to get the vaccine. That's a good thing. The fact of the matter is: We don't have the supply we need yet, but we will – and the good news is that we do have a plan to get 50,000 shots in arms per day when the supply comes in." The more COVID-19 "vaccines sent by the federal government, the sooner Michiganders will be vaccinated."

Over 4,000 COVID-19 Deaths In Colorado Could Be Prevented If Residents Keep Up Precautions, Model Says.

The Denver Post (1/27, Wingerter, 660K) reports that "if Coloradans can keep up what they're doing to reduce the spread of COVID-19 through the end of spring, more than 4,000 additional friends and neighbors may still be around to celebrate this summer, according to new projections." In the projections' "best-case scenario, the public maintains roughly the level of precautions they're practicing now, efforts to vaccinate older people stay on track and a more-contagious strain of the new virus never takes hold." However, "even if everything goes right...the pandemic's death toll could reach 6,000 by June 1, according to the projections from the Colorado School of Public Health."

West Virginia Governor: If State Had Enough COVID-19 Vaccine Doses By Valentine's Day, Every Senior Would Be Inoculated.

CNBC (1/27, DeCiccio, 7.34M) reports West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice (R) "lauded his state's coronavirus vaccine distribution success, and claimed that if the Mountain State had the 'doses by Valentine's Day, every person in this state, 65 years of age and older, would be vaccinated.'" On CNBC's "The News with Shepard Smith," Justice said, "We didn't necessarily take the federal approach, we took a practical approach, and we took an all in approach. ... We brought our National Guard, our local pharmacies, our local health care people, and our local health clinics and everything." The governor "added that the West Virginia model 'isn't rocket science, this is just about moving and not sitting back and planning a strategy.'"

Iowa Governor's Administration Arranged COVID-19 Testing For Employees Of Company Whose Owners Are Governor's Top Donors.

The AP (1/27, Pitt, Foley) reports Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds' (R) "administration arranged coronavirus testing for employees at the suburban office of a large pork company whose owners are her top donors, underscoring allegations that her wealthy supporters have received special treatment." The Iowa health department "coordinated the July 13 testing outside the West Des Moines office that houses the administrative headquarters

of Iowa Select Farms and its charity, the company confirmed to The Associated Press on Wednesday." Iowa Select "owners Jeff and Deb Hansen have donated nearly $300,000 to Reynolds' gubernatorial campaigns, including a $175,000 check in 2017 and a $50,000 gift last fall, disclosure records show."

Ohio's COVID-19 Curfew To Be Shortened.

The AP (1/27, Welsh-Huggins, Amiri) reports "the curfew meant to slow the spread of the coronavirus in Ohio will be shortened beginning Thursday as a result of falling hospitalization numbers, Republican Gov. Mike DeWine said." The state's health department "says 2,944 people were hospitalized with the coronavirus Wednesday, down from...2,964 on Tuesday." The state's "10 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew will be shortened to 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. beginning Thursday."

Editorial Praises Improvements In Minnesota's COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.

In an editorial, the Minneapolis Star Tribune (1/27, 855K) says that in Minnesota, "scrutiny is needed right now to ensure that the current [COVID-19] vaccine stock is being given promptly." That is "why new data released this week by the state Department of Health is an important step forward." The data address the question of "which organizations are performing well, and which are lagging, when it comes to getting shots in arms." Along "with these changes, Gov. Tim Walz on Monday took a smart additional step, calling on providers to 'administer 90% of their vaccine doses within three days of receiving them, and all doses within one week.'" Providers that do not "should anticipate potential changes to their vaccine allocations." The paper concludes that "highlighting where improvements can be made can help ensure limited supplies of this lifesaving vaccine are given swiftly."

Some Health Systems In Minnesota Reaching Out To Seniors To Offer COVID-19 Vaccine.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune (1/27, Howatt, 855K) reports "some Minnesota health systems, including HealthPartners and Essentia Health, have reached out to some of their elderly patients, offering them the [COVID-19] vaccine now that many of their front-line health care workers have been inoculated." According to the Star Tribune, "HealthPartners said it began notifying its patients over the age of 74 that they can make appointments to get the vaccine." However, "it does raise questions about the distribution system for Minnesota's seniors, given that some have to wait while others don't."

Not All Originally Prioritized Educators In Twin Cities Will Receive COVID-19 Shots.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune (1/27, Olson, 855K) reports "mass vaccination of 15,000 Twin Cities educators will begin at the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul Thursday, but not all 15,000 originally prioritized for the [COVID-19] shots will get them." Sharing of the "sign-up link intended for specific teachers created the glitch, resulting in appointments being quickly filled Tuesday night by some educators who weren't prioritized, and some schools getting shut out."

New York Governor Releases "Troubling" COVID-19 Vaccination Figures For Nursing Homes.

The New York Post (1/27, Campanile, Hogan, 7.45M) reports New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) "on Wednesday finally released detailed figures of nursing-home coronavirus vaccination rates amid criticism over the lack of information – revealing that less than half of workers at Big Apple facilities have received the jab."

Cuomo's "office posted regional data on inoculation rates for nursing home workers and residents on its vaccine tracking website." The data are "troubling," as just 40% "of nursing homes staffers in New York City and Long Island have been vaccinated for the virus – tied for lowest in the state."

New York Governor Faces Criticism After Blaming COVID-19 Fatalities On "Incompetent Government."

The New York Post (1/27, Hogan, Golding, 7.45M) reports New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) "was roasted for blaming COVID-19 deaths on 'incompetent government' – without mentioning his own administration's controversial nursing-home policy that's been accused of leading to more than 8,700 senior deaths." While appearing on MSNBC on Tuesday, "Cuomo accused former President Donald Trump of mishandling the pandemic, saying: 'Incompetent government kills people. More people died than needed to die in COVID. That's the truth.'" The assertion "was quickly seized upon by critics who alluded to the state's since-rescinded March mandate for nursing homes to accept 'medically stable' coronavirus patients."

Chemung County, New York Threatening To Mandate Residents To Quarantine Following Possible COVID-19 Exposure.

The New York Post (1/27, Garger, 7.45M) reports Chemung County, New York "is threatening to require residents to quarantine if they may have been in contact with a COVID-19 patient or returned from certain restricted states, a report said." The possible enforcement in the county "was outlined in a letter that was distributed by state contact tracers, a health official told Fox News, which obtained a copy of the missive." According to the Post, "Chemung County Public Health Director Peter Buzzetti III told the news outlet that he has legal authority to require county residents to quarantine, but noted such a drastic move is a 'worst case scenario.'"

Iowa Governor Says Feds Promised States 17% Jump In Moderna Vaccine Allocation Beginning In Early February.

The AP (1/27, Pitt) reports Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds (R) "said Wednesday the federal government is promising states a 17% increase in one of the vaccines the state receives starting in early February, potentially boosting the number of shots available amid frustration that eligible people have been unable to get vaccinated." The governor "said officials in President Joe Biden's administration promised governors in a call Tuesday that the federal government would increase state allocations to accelerate the national vaccination program." The boosted US "supply would raise Iowa's weekly doses of the Moderna vaccine to 25,800 a week for at least three weeks beginning Feb. 8, an Iowa Department of Public Health spokeswoman said."

Virginia Governor Addresses Frustrations Over COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout, Announces Improvements To Data Transparency.

The Washington Times (1/27, Muñoz, 626K) reports Gov. Ralph Northam (D) "addressed frustrations over Virginia's vaccine rollout Wednesday and announced a new system to improve data transparency from the state." The governor "said during a press conference that the issue is rooted in the lack of supply from the federal government." Northam said, "I feel the frustration out there. We are doing everything that we can to save lives and at the end of the day, as the governor of Virginia, I'm responsible." The governor "announced Wednesday

the launch of a new database for the Virginia Department of Health that displays the total number of doses administered and the number of people either given their first dose or are fully vaccinated."

Role Race Should Play In COVID-19 Vaccine Priority Put To Test In Oregon.

The AP (1/28, Flaccus) reports "the role that race should play in deciding who gets priority for the COVID-19 vaccine in the next phase of the rollout is being put to the test in Oregon as tensions around equity and access to the shots emerge nationwide." An advisory panel "that provides recommendations to Oregon's governor and public health authorities will vote Thursday on whether to prioritize people of color, target those with chronic medical conditions or focus on some combination of groups at higher risk from the coronavirus." Other groups, "such as essential workers, refugees, inmates and people under 65 living in group settings, are also being considered."

Cleveland Clinic Finds Portion Of N95 Mask Supply Was Counterfeit.

The Cleveland Plain Dealer (1/27, Fields, 1.22M) reports "the Cleveland Clinic has found that a portion of its N95 mask supply used between November and Monday were counterfeit and 'not effective as respirators,' according to the health system." In order "to be classified as N95, respirator masks must meet standards from the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and filter at least 95% of airborne particles." The health system "released a statement late Wednesday, saying that a manufacturer tipped off administrators that some of its purchases were counterfeit."

Opinion: Adults Owe It To Adolescents To Go "All In" To Battle COVID-19.

In an opinion piece for the Washington Post (1/27, 10.52M), Rebekah Fenton, a pediatrician and adolescent medicine fellow at Northwestern University and Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, says COVID-19's impact "on adolescents' well-being should not go overlooked." The pandemic "has wreaked havoc on their lives. Closed schools. Interrupted access to free lunch and essential technology. Canceled activities. Forced an inability to hang out with friends." Fenton asserts "our nationwide New Year's resolution should be going all in to fight the coronavirus, prioritizing the comprehensive health of everyone, including adolescents." Fenton says "we owe it to them to see this crisis through."

Dems Draft Plan To Transform Tax Credit For Children Into Monthly Payment As Part Of COVID-19 Stimulus Proposal.

Politico New York (1/27, Faler) reports that "as part of their latest coronavirus stimulus plan, Democrats are drafting a proposal to expand and transform a long-standing tax credit for children – normally taken once a year at tax time – into a monthly payment." Democrats "aim to send $250 each month per child – $300 for kids under the age of six – in what would be the country's first-ever child allowance." It is "designed to substantially reduce the number of children living in poverty by getting money into their parents' pockets quickly and steadily."

Biden Administration Launches Offensive Aimed At Garnering Support For $1.9T COVID-19 Relief Package.

Newsweek (1/27, Crisp, 2.67M) reports President "Biden's administration has launched a major offensive as it tries to build support for his proposed $1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package – while Republican lawmakers have

largely balked at the massive price tag." Biden Press Secretary Jan Psaki said to reporters, "The president and vice president are engaging directly with members [of Congress] and have had a number of productive conversations that will continue and pick up in the days ahead." She added, "Senior White House officials are also engaging with – not just congressional leaders – but also state and local officials, constituency groups and others to gather feedback on the proposal."

Dems Can Reportedly Use Budget Reconciliation To Muscle Through $1.9T Stimulus Proposal Without Republican Support.

The New York Times (1/27, Cochrane, 20.6M) reports that "if President Biden wants to quickly enact his $1.9 trillion stimulus proposal over Republican opposition, Democrats have a powerful tool they could use to do it." Through "budget reconciliation, Democrats could muscle through the package – which would provide billions of dollars for vaccine deployment, another round of stimulus checks and an extension of unemployment benefits – on a simple majority vote, bypassing a messy filibuster fight that would require them to win over enough Republicans to reach a 60-vote threshold." Although "Biden has said he wants to abandon the partisan tactics of the past and forge compromises with Republicans, he has also proposed an ambitious plan that stands little chance of broad support from the party."

CDC Observes Lower Rate Of Severe Allergic Reactions To Pfizer Coronavirus Vaccines Than Previously Reported.

Reuters (1/27, Erman) reports the CDC announced "it is observing a lower rate of severe allergic reactions in people in the United States who have received" the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine. The agency "said that through Jan. 18, there were 50 cases of anaphylaxis reported in recipients of the vaccine," implying "a rate of about 5 per million doses administered," which is lower than the "previously reported rate of 11.1 per million doses administered through Dec. 23."

MedPage Today (1/27, Walker, 183K) reports that "rates of anaphylaxis for the Moderna vaccine remained 'comparable,' at 2.8 per million, compared with 2.5 per million from CDC data last week."

Pfizer Vaccine Only Slightly Less Effective Against South African Coronavirus Variant, Study Suggests.

Reuters (1/27, Erman, Soares, Raman) reports, "Pfizer Inc and BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine appeared to lose only a small bit of effectiveness against an engineered virus with three key mutations from the new coronavirus variant found in South Africa, according to a laboratory study conducted by the U.S. drugmaker." The study by Pfizer and scientists from the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB), "which has not yet been peer-reviewed, showed a less than two-fold reduction in antibody titer levels, indicating the vaccine would likely be effective in neutralizing a virus with the so-called E484K and N501Y mutations found in the South African variant." The study "was conducted on blood taken from people who had received the vaccine."

The Wall Street Journal (1/27, Hernandez, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) also covers the story.

BioNTech To Manufacture 125 Million Doses Of The Pfizer-BioNTech Coronavirus Vaccine At Sanofi Facilities.

The AP (1/27, Charlton) reports Sanofi announced "it will help manufacture 125 million doses of the coronavirus vaccine developed by rivals Pfizer and BioNTech, while its own vaccine candidate faces delays." BioNTech will "produce the vaccines at Sanofi facilities in Frankfurt, starting in the summer."

GSK, Vir To Test COVID-19 Antibody Treatments In Combination.

Bloomberg (1/27, Ring, Court, 3.57M) reports GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and partner Vir Biotechnology "have teamed up with Eli Lilly and Co. to test a combination of their Covid-19 antibody treatments to see whether they can better combat the virus and its variants together." GSK and Vir will put "one of two antibodies they're testing in trials with Lilly's bamlanivimab" to assess efficacy in "low-risk patients with mild to moderate symptoms." Lilly has "reported positive results...from another combination with its antibody drug," bamlanivimab and etesevimab, a combination which the FDA is reviewing.

Care Access Research Lends Decentralized Clinical Trial Platform To AstraZeneca For COVID-19 Monoclonal Antibodies.

FierceBiotech (1/27, Adams, 4K) reports, "Care Access Research is lending its decentralized clinical trial platform to AstraZeneca for its late-stage COVID-19 drug test." The virtual trial specialist aims to "help the British Big Pharma 'accelerate a clinical trial' in the U.S. for AZD7442, AstraZeneca's long-acting monoclonal antibody combination aimed at helping prevent COVID-19."

Mistrust, Inequities Slow Efforts To Vaccinate Americans Of Color.

NBC Nightly News (1/27, story 8, 3:25, Holt, 6M) reported on mistrust of the COVID vaccines "among communities of color." NBC's Morgan Radford: "One poll found only 26% of Hispanics said they would get the vaccine as soon as possible, compared to 40% of whites. ... Lack of trust is not the only problem. Out of 16 states that reporting data by race, almost all of them show a higher percentage of Latinos who will die from the virus than those receiving the vaccine."

Physicians Say "COVID Arm" Rash Seen After Moderna Vaccine Is Harmless.

USA Today (1/27, Weise, 12.7M) reports physicians says "an angry red rash being called 'COVID arm' is a harmless but annoying response in some people who get the Moderna vaccine." The article adds, "There is no indication the reaction is anything but a topical – and brief – response as the body's immune system goes to work, said" Massachusetts General Hospital Global Health Dermatology Director Dr. Esther Freeman. She "is the principal investigator in the global COVID-19 dermatological registry, which is collecting case reports of people experiencing COVID-19 responses."

Oxford Scientist Expects Analysis On Vaccine's Efficacy Against UK Coronavirus Variant By Next Week.

Reuters (1/27, Aripaka) reports University of Oxford Vaccine Group Director Andrew Pollard, who is chief investigator of the COVID-19 vaccine trials, said Wednesday that the university expects to "put together an analysis on efficacy against" the UK variant of the novel coronavirus "probably by next week." Oxford University "will also work on a vaccine version that will target the South African variant of the virus, according to a media report on Tuesday."

PharmaMar Shares Rise 21% After Study Suggests Its Drug Has Efficacy Against COVID-19.

Reuters (1/27, Landauro, Castellanos, Pinedo) reports Spanish pharmaceutical company PharmaMar saw its shares go up 21% "on Tuesday after it cited" a study "that confirmed 'potent preclinical efficacy' of its drug Aplidin [plitidepsin] against COVID-19." The study published in Science showed Aplidin "leads to a reduction of viral replication, resulting in a 99% reduction of viral loads in the lungs of animals...according to a PharmaMar statement." According to the article, "The drug, approved in Australia for the treatment of multiple myeloma, blocks a protein associated with the COVID-19 virus."

FierceBiotech (1/27, Liu, 4K) reports, "Researchers from the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and the University of California, San Francisco found in preclinical experiments that" plitidepsin "was almost 30 times more potent than remdesivir." Meanwhile, separate findings published on the journal preprint site bioRxiv indicate "the drug had comparable antiviral activity against the original SARS-CoV-2 strain and the new, more contagious B117 variant, which was first discovered in the U.K."

COVID-19 Vaccines Offer Retirement Homes Hope For End To Isolation.

The Wall Street Journal (1/27, Carlton, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that vaccinations against COVID-19 offer residents hope for an end to isolation at retirement communities as they look forward to once again receiving visits from their family.

Manufacturing Association Releases PSA To Counter Vaccine Hesitancy.

The Hill (1/27, Gangitano, 5.69M) reports, "The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) released a public service announcement on Wednesday intended to counter vaccine hesitancy" as "part of a project called 'This Is Our Shot' with the Manufacturing Institute, the workforce development and education partner of the NAM." The article adds, "The PSA highlights why manufacturers are getting a COVID-19 vaccine, including protecting their family, coworkers and the people they love."

Arizona Hospital System Begins Treating Some Patients With Severe COVID-19 Using Tocilizumab.

The Arizona Republic (1/28, Innes, 1.05M) reports officials with the Phoenix-based Banner Health officials "this month began using the anti-inflammatory drug tocilizumab" as a treatment for "a select group of critically ill COVID-19 patients at risk of dying." The FDA has not approved the drug "for treating COVID-19 patients, nor does it have a government Emergency Use Authorization." However, "the drug, when given according to a strict protocol to a specific population of COVID-19 patients hospitalized in intensive care units, may reduce the number of days those patients need breathing assistance, including from mechanical ventilators, said Dr. Jason Brown, chief medical officer for Banner Pharmacy Services."

California Investigating Second Patient To Die After Receiving Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine.

Fox News (1/27, Rivas, 23.99M) reports the widow of California X-ray technician Tim Zook, "who died after receiving the second dose of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine[,] says her late husband 'believed in vaccines.'" Investigators are looking into "Zook's death after he allegedly developed an onslaught of medical issues following the second dose of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine." The article adds, "The news comes amid reports of a separate

patient in Placer County who tested positive for COVID-19 in late December, was vaccinated Thursday and died several hours after receiving the shot, the Placer County Sheriff's office announced Saturday."

Eli, Regeneron To Seek FDA Authorization To Use Monoclonal Antibody Treatments To Prevent COVID-19.

CNN (1/27, Christensen, 89.21M) reports Regeneron and Eli Lilly say they have shown their monoclonal antibody treatments "can help prevent severe coronavirus disease in people who are already infected" are planning to ask the US FDA "for authorization to use them as a kind of 'passive vaccine' to protect people at high risk of infection." The article adds, "The treatments made by Regeneron and Eli Lilly and Co. are only authorized for use with non-hospitalized patients at high risk of severe disease." Eli Lilly on Tuesday "discussed what it called 'a remarkable' prevention trial that it did with nursing home patients and staff." Meanwhile, "Regeneron has been testing its antibody treatment as a way to protect people vulnerable to infection after someone in their own home has tested positive."

Some 45% Of Older Adults Lack Online Medical Accounts To Connect Them With COVID-19 Vaccines, Analysis Finds.

FierceHealthcare (1/27, Reed, 150K) reports older adults "are also less likely to be using the tech tools such as online patient portals that would help notify them about vaccine availability and appointment scheduling, according to" a new analysis from "National Poll on Healthy Aging, based at the University of Michigan's Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation." The research indicated "nearly half (45%) of individuals between the ages of 65 and 80 said they had not set up an account with their health provider's online portal system."

Philippines Regulator Grants AstraZeneca COVID-19 Vaccine Emergency Use Authorization.

Reuters (1/27, Jerome Morales) reports, "The Philippines' Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved the emergency use of AstraZeneca PLC's COVID-19 vaccine, the second to be approved in the Southeast Asian nation." During a news conference, FDA chief Rolando Enrique Domingo said the vaccine's benefits outweighed the known risks. told a news conference.

Bloomberg (1/27, Calonzo, 3.57M) reports, "The Philippines has signed deals with AstraZeneca for 17 million doses, with first shipments expected to arrive in May."

House Democrat Says COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Should Not "Be Tainted With Politics."

The Hill (1/27, Oakes, 5.69M) reports Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) said Wednesday that the Trump Administration's efforts to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine were "disjointed and had an appearance of being very partisan," adding that the US needs strong leadership to distribute the vaccine and educate the public about it. Speaking at The Hill's "The Challenge of Our Time: The COVID-19 Vaccine" event, Johnson said "This really is not an issue that should be tainted with politics. It's pure science and pure healthcare."

Some Asian Americans Find It Difficult To Get Jobs Back After Having Lost Them During Pandemic.

Bloomberg (1/27, 3.57M) reports, "Asian Americans who lost their jobs during the pandemic have found it harder than most to get them back." The unemployment rate of 5.9% "among the roughly 10 million-strong Asian workforce in December was below the national rate." However, "in the final three months of 2020, almost half of jobless Asians had been out of work for at least 27 weeks – a bigger share than White, Black or Hispanic Americans."

Opinion/Analysis: Bill Gates' Thoughts On Pandemic Preparedness Set The Stage For Government Policy Worldwide.

In an analysis/opinion piece for the Washington Times (1/27, Chumley, 626K), online opinion editor Cheryl Chumley writes, "Bill Gates has a background in software but a passion for pandemics so that plus his considerable wealth has bought him prestige and influence with global medical bureaucrats." According to Chumley, "when he says future 'pandemic preparedness must be taken as seriously as we take the threat of war' – which he just did, via his Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's annual letter – it sets the stage for worldwide government policy." Chumley says that "his preferred method of policy is to regulate and control."

Since February, YouTube Removed Over 500K COVID-19 Misinformation Videos, CEO Says.

USA Today (1/27, Murphy, 12.7M) reports, "YouTube removed more than 500,000 videos spreading misinformation related to the COVID-19 pandemic since February, according to a letter by YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki." The company's "policies prohibit misinformation about the coronavirus, including claims the virus is a hoax or promoting medically unsubstantiated cures." In October, YouTube "began removing content about COVID-19 vaccines that contradicts consensus from health authorities, such as the Centers for Disease Control or the World Health Organization."

Some California Business Owners Covertly Carried On Business Despite COVID-19 Restrictions.

The Los Angeles Times (1/27, Chang, 3.37M) reports, "The COVID-19 shutdown orders imposed in March and again during the holidays crippled large swaths of the California economy." However, "even before an easing of restrictions announced this week by Gov. Gavin Newsom, some business owners continued to carry on covertly." Those who operated "for months under the radar say their decision isn't a repudiation of face masks, social distancing or government overreach, or about enabling parties during a pandemic." Instead, "it's simply to make ends meet, and in the absence of sufficient financial assistance and clear guidance, they have been relying on themselves – and discreet customers they can trust – to do it."

Orthopedic Patients Await Surgeries Delayed By COVID-19.

STAT (1/27, Cooney, 262K) reports patients who need orthopedic surgery, such as knee replacements, are sometimes suffering through pain as they wait for hospitals to again perform elective surgeries. STAT says, "Elective doesn't mean optional; for some people anticipating operations to ease their pain or halt their disease, hospitals' decisions about what's elective involves a grim calculus of how long they can wait."

Opinion: Vaccinated Volunteers Needed To Support Patients With COVID-19.

In an opinion piece for STAT (1/27, 262K), anesthesiologist and pain specialist Ben Moor writes, "I got my first dose of a Covid-19 vaccine on Dec. 16, and was surprised at the feeling of relief, hope, almost exhilaration it brought on instantly." Moor adds, "Shielded behind an N95, visor, gown, and gloves, I reckon I'm now about as safe as I can be. So when my day's work as an anesthesiologist is done, I've started sitting with Covid-19 patients." Moor says, "We need an army of vaccinated volunteers to support patients and be a conduit for their families, to help them through the worst days – sometimes the last days – of their lives."

Public Health Systems Made Series Of Missteps During Pandemic.

The Stateline (1/27, Ollove, Vestal, 2K) reports, "The chaotic execution of state and local vaccination programs is only the latest in a series of missteps by public health departments during the worst pandemic in more than a century," including "lackluster testing, contact tracing and data collection, and the failure to protect minority communities, which have borne the brunt of this disease." Dr. Ronald Valdiserri, "a former high-ranking official at the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention," said, "In this country, policymakers tend to pay attention to public health when there is a crisis or an emergency." President Biden's nomination for HHS assistant secretary Dr. Rachel Levine said, "What this pandemic has shown us is the singular importance of public health."

23andMe Calculator Aims To Predict Risk Of Severe COVID-19 Development.

Bloomberg (1/27, Brown, 3.57M) reports, "DNA-testing company 23andMe Inc. has launched a new tool that aims to predict an infected person's risk of developing a severe case of Covid-19, expanding the company's bid to deliver actionable insight on health." The "new COVID-19 Severity Calculator was launched on Wednesday." T

App Measures Risk Of COVID-19 Exposure In Dallas County Residents.

Health IT Analytics (1/27, Kent) reports, "The Parkland Center for Clinical Innovation (PCCI) has released an app that uses machine learning and real-time data to measure COVID-19 exposure risk in Dallas County residents." This "MyPCI App will aim to help individuals make more informed choices by providing on-demand, location-based personal risk assessment of potential COVID-19 exposure." The app "uses daily updated data from the Dallas County Health and Human Services (DCHHS) on confirmed positive COVID-19 cases and the population density in a given neighborhood."

Despite Pandemic, 25% Of Poll Respondents Say They Will Gather With Members Outside Household To Watch Super Bowl 55.

USA Today (1/27, Reyes, 12.7M) reports, "Despite the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to grip the nation, a quarter of respondents to a poll said they planned to gather with members outside of their household to watch Super Bowl 55 between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers." This "Seton Hall Sports Poll collected answers from 1,522 adults spread all over the country from Jan. 22-25," and the "data show that 25% of respondents said they would gather with people outside of their home – defined as those who aren't roommates or cohabitants – to watch the game." USA Today says, "The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention discourage gatherings, but advise that strict precautions should be observed if people decide to have them."

Three New At-Home SARS-CoV-2 Tests To Become Available Soon.

NBC News (1/27, Popken, Nguyen, 4.91M) reports three new at-home SARS-CoV-2 "tests are hitting the market soon." The article compares and contrasts the BinaxNow, Lucira and Ellume tests.

White House Moves Forward With Meetings On Coronavirus Relief Package.

The Hill (1/27, Chalfant, 5.69M) reports that the White House "is moving forward with a range of meetings with lawmakers and other stakeholders as President Biden urges the passage of his $1.9 trillion coronavirus relief proposal." Press Secretary Jen Psaki "told reporters Wednesday that Biden and Vice President Harris are 'engaged directly' with members of Congress on COVID-19 relief and described conversations as productive, though she did not provide specific details on any of their meetings." Psaki "said that National Economic Council Director Brian Deese and Jeff Zients, who is overseeing the White House's coronavirus response, are scheduled to meet with members of the New Democrat Coalition of moderate congressional Democrats."

Opinion: Biden's Stimulus Package Is A Trojan Horse.

In an op-ed for the New York Times (1/27, 20.6M), Steven Rattner, who served as counselor to the Treasury secretary in the Obama Administration, writes that while President Biden's COVID-19 relief plan "contains many commendable provisions," it is "also partly a legislative Trojan horse -- an enormous aid package aimed at addressing needs that, in some cases, go well beyond the immediate challenges of Covid." Rattner says Biden "has wisely put helping all struggling Americans...at the top of his priority list," but "his administration can do so far more surgically, and with a nod toward our long-term fiscal challenges. We don't necessarily need (at least not now) as much stimulus as he is offering."

Federal Reserve Chairman Says Getting Americans Vaccinated Is Most Important Economic Action.

The Washington Post (1/27, Werner, Siegel, 10.52M) reports that Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome H. Powell "said Wednesday that getting Americans vaccinated is the most important thing to help the economy, comments that could boost President Biden's push to pass a massive new relief package that includes big spending on vaccines." Powell "said at a news conference following the Fed's regular policy meeting: 'There's nothing more important to the economy right now than people getting vaccinated. That's the single most important economic growth policy that we can have.'"

The Hill (1/27, Lane, 5.69M) also reports.

WPost: Keeping Democrats Focused On Areas That Truly Need Assistance Is Worthy Goal For Biden.

The Washington Post (1/27, 10.52M) editorializes that President Biden's proposed $1.9 trillion coronavirus stimulus package includes direct payments and that a recent study shows "that only about 7 percent of the $200 billion that would go to singles earning more than $50,000 or couples earning more than $75,000 would be spent. Mr. Biden could reduce the cost of his direct payment plan by almost half with little negative impact on anything except the savings of people well outside the group -- workers earning $27,000 or less -- that has suffered most in the pandemic." The Post editorial board writes, "Along with addressing the country's triple crises of disease, joblessness and governance, keeping Democrats focused on the areas where government assistance is genuinely indispensable would be a worthy goal for the Biden administration's first 100 days."

Opinion: Political Partisans Should Be Uniting To Fight COVID-19, Not Each Other.

In an opinion piece for the Washington Post (1/27, 10.52M), Princeton University Professor Alan S. Blinder and Columbia University Professor R. Glenn Hubbard write, "America faces a dire public health and economic emergency, yet the usual partisan lines are being drawn in Congress as the Democratic left and the Republican right gird for battle over President Biden's coronavirus relief plan. These political partisans should be uniting to fight covid-19, not fighting each other." The two lay out three principles for lawmakers to keep in mind and argue, "The nation is suffering from two critical shortages: vaccines and political good will. Congress has the power to address both of them."

Most States Do Not Report Racial Data On People Receiving Coronavirus Vaccines.

The Washington Post (1/27, Fadulu, Keating, 10.52M) reports that most states "are not publicly reporting racial data on people receiving coronavirus vaccines, despite disproportionate covid-19 death rates for Black and Hispanic people and rising concerns about who has access to – and is willing to take – the vaccine." Seven weeks "after the first shots were administered, just 20 states include race and ethnicity data on their vaccine dashboards, even though it is required by the federal government." And even those states "have major gaps in their data, with 'unknown' being the first or second most-frequent category in almost every state."

States Are Gradually Lifting Virus Restrictions Amid Fears Of New Variants.

The AP (1/27, Eggert, Babwin) reports that US states "are loosening their coronavirus restrictions on restaurants and other businesses because of improved infection and hospitalization numbers but are moving gradually and cautiously, in part because of the more contagious variant taking hold in the U.S." While the easing "could cause case rates to rise, health experts say it can work if done in a measured way and if the public remains vigilant about masks and social distancing." Dr. Arnold Monto, a public health professor at the University of Michigan, said: "If the frequency goes up, you tighten it up. If the frequency goes down, you loosen up. Getting it just right is almost impossible."

Some Minnesota Health Systems Flout Vaccine Rollout Guidance.

The AP (1/27) reports that some hospital systems in Minnesota "are flouting state and federal guidance on the hierarchy for receiving the coronavirus vaccine, according to health officials." The Minnesota Department of Health "has deputized large health systems to distribute the vaccine as part of a public-private partnership." Currently the state "has prioritized vaccinating people who provide in-person health care services or people living and working in congregate care settings." But at places "like Mayo Clinic, HealthPartners and Allina Health, people who don't have patient contact or who can work from home are getting vaccinated, Minnesota Public Radio News reported."

Los Angeles Officials Raise Alarm Over Racial Inequities In Vaccine Rollout.

The Los Angeles Times (1/27, Shalby, Cosgrove, Money, Lin, 3.37M) reports, "Just weeks into California's rocky rollout of the coronavirus vaccine, evidence is emerging of inequities in who is getting the medicine, prompting growing demands that vulnerable communities receive more attention." Los Angeles County officials "said they are concerned about low vaccination numbers among healthcare workers in South L.A. and other communities of

color, while advocates for essential workers worry that California's new vaccine priority plan slows their ability to get inoculated despite the dangers inherent in their jobs." The county Department of Public Health "released demographic data Tuesday showing a significantly lower rate of vaccinations for healthcare workers who live in South L.A., home to large populations of Black and Latino residents, compared with other regions."

Support Grows For Plan To Use Los Angeles Schools As COVID-19 Vaccine Centers.

The Los Angeles Times (1/27, Cosgrove, 3.37M) reports, "Support is growing for a plan to use neighborhood schools to distribute the coronavirus vaccine." On Tuesday, Los Angeles County supervisors "endorsed the use of schools as vaccine centers, as the campuses are trusted neighborhood hubs in communities that are being hit hard by infections, including Pacoima, San Fernando, South Los Angeles and the Eastside." The L.A. Unified School District "says it has 12 school-based health clinics that are staffed with nurses who are already trained to give vaccinations and are ready to provide coronavirus vaccines."

Chicago Teachers Refuse To Return To Classrooms, Threaten To Strike.

Reuters (1/27) reports that Chicago public school teachers have "threatened to stop working altogether if the district retaliates against any of them who failed to report to school buildings on Wednesday to prepare to resume in-person learning for tens of thousands of students next week." According to Reuters, the Chicago Teachers Union "has been locked in negotiations with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) for months over a plan to gradually reopen schools for the system's 355,000 students," and "the labor dispute came to a head on Sunday when the rank and file union membership voted 71% in favor of a resolution not to return to the classroom." Reuters adds that "despite the vote, the district ordered some 10,000 teachers to report to work on Wednesday, instead of Monday as initially planned."

The Washington Post (1/27, Reiss, Bellware, 10.52M) reports that the Chicago Public Schools "suspended in-person learning Wednesday affecting more than 3,200 prekindergarten and special-education students after teachers planned to defy district orders to return to classrooms once negotiations broke down late Tuesday over school-reopening strategy." According to the Post, "The developments set the table for a potential teachers strike in the country's third-largest district."

The Chicago Tribune (1/27, Yin, Bonilla, Pratt, Leone, 2.03M) also reports on the story.

Philadelphia Cuts Ties With Group Charged With Administering COVID-19 Vaccines.

The Hill (1/27, Budryk, 5.69M) reports that Philadelphia "has cut ties with a group charged with administering COVID-19 vaccinations after the group quietly changed its status from non-profit to for-profit." The startup, Philly Fighting COVID, "included a group of college students with minimal experience tasked with delivering coronavirus vaccinations, leading to extensive logistical issues and accusations of misconduct, according to The Washington Post." In addition to the group "changing its corporate status, reports emerged that it had quietly altered its privacy policy to allow it to sell personal data and its CEO Andrei Doroshin faced allegations that he had taken extra vaccine doses for himself, which he has denied."

Sanofi Will Help Produce Millions Of Doses Of Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine In Europe.

The Hill (1/27, Weixel, 5.69M) reports that pharmaceutical company Sanofi "will help produce millions of doses of the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer and German company BioNTech in an effort to help meet the huge

demand for the shots." The French drugmaker in a statement Wednesday "said it will provide BioNTech access to its 'established infrastructure and expertise' in an unusual arrangement to produce more than 125 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine in Europe." Initial supplies "will originate from Sanofi's production facilities in Frankfurt beginning this summer, the company said."

Washington Governor Blasts Hospital System For Offering Vaccine Appointments To Donors.

The Hill (1/27, Budryk, 5.69M) reports that Washington Gov. Jay Inslee (D) "castigated a Bellevue-based hospital system over an email in which leadership offered appointments for coronavirus vaccinations to major donors." Inslee said in a news conference: "If in fact they were giving preference to some VIP list, that's not the way to do it. That is not acceptable for us. We need to give everybody a fair shot at the vaccine."

Georgia Health Officials Refuse To Say Where In State New Virus Strain Has Been Detected.

The AP (1/27) reports that Georgia health officials "are refusing to say where in the state they have detected a mutant coronavirus strain from the United Kingdom." The Department of Public Health "refuses to say which cities or counties have had people infected by the new variant, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported." That "makes it impossible for Georgians to know whether it is spreading in their community."

Experts In CDC's Backyard Offer Different Opinions On Reopening Schools.

The AP (1/27, Franko) reports, "Just down the road from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in a community flush with resident health professionals, the Decatur, Georgia, school system had no shortage of expert input on whether to resume in-person classes amid the coronavirus pandemic." One emergency medicine physician "said initial reopening plans for the district's 5,000-plus students weren't safe enough." A pediatrician "doing epidemiology work for the CDC advocated delaying. Others, including a leader of the CDC's COVID-19 vaccine efforts, argued the district could get students back in classrooms safely – and that not doing so jeopardized their development and mental health."

Missouri Plans To Divert Vaccine Doses From Pharmacies To Speed Process.

The AP (1/27) reports that Republican Gov. Mike Parson "plans to divert thousands of unused doses of coronavirus vaccine from CVS and Walgreens pharmacies to other state-enrolled vaccinators in Missouri to help the slower-than-expected vaccination process, his spokeswoman said Wednesday." Spokeswoman Kelli Jones "said the administration has requested the return of 25,000 doses from CVS and Walgreens, which would then be re-routed to county health departments, medical hospitals and clinics, and hundreds of other state-approved vaccinators." CVS and Walgreens "were tasked with providing vaccinations at long-term care facilities under a Trump administration plan unveiled in December."

North Dakota Governor Lowers State's Risk Level, Approves Higher Occupancy Limits.

The AP (1/27) reports that North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum (R) on Wednesday "lowered the statewide risk level for the coronavirus, increasing the occupancy limits for bars, restaurants and other food service establishments." Burgum "noted that active cases had dropped to 1,016 Wednesday from more than 10,000 in mid-November and

that the state's 14-day positivity rate has decreased to about 3%, the lowest since Aug. 22." The governor "adjusted the risk level from moderate to low, effective Jan. 29."

North Dakota Lawmakers Push Legislation To Shield Businesses From Virus Suits.

The AP (1/27) reports that some North Dakota lawmakers "are pushing legislation aimed at shielding businesses and health care facilities from lawsuits over customers' or employees' COVID-19 exposure, despite criticism that it may be unconstitutional and could relax protections for workers." The House Industry, Business and Labor Committee "held hearings Wednesday on a pair of bills aimed at limiting coronavirus-related liability lawsuits." One, HB1376, "is backed by Republicans and would give immunity to businesses, unless an employer caused damage or an injury due to 'willful misconduct or infliction of harm.'" The other, HB 1175, "is a bipartisan measure that is broader and limits exposure of health care facilities from lawsuits relating to COVID-19 exposure."

As California Lifts Virus Restrictions, Top Health Official Worries Variants Pose Increasing Risk.

CNN (1/27, Holcombe, 89.21M) reports, "The stay-at-home order in California has ended, but a top Los Angeles health official worries that another spike could be on the horizon as Covid-19 variants spread and the supply of vaccines struggles to meet the demand." State officials in California, "a recent epicenter of the pandemic in the US, lifted the regional stay at home order for all five regions on Monday in light of expectations that the ICU bed capacity would meet a key threshold in four weeks." Trends "are moving in a positive direction as well in Los Angeles County, which has more than halved its number of daily positive cases since reaching a peak earlier in January, said the county's public health director Barbara Ferrer." But she "warned that coronavirus variants pose an increasing threat."

Some States Begin To Ease Pandemic Restrictions As Hopeful Signs Emerge.

Reuters (1/27, Bernstein) reports that severe COVID-19 infections "are beginning to abate in many parts of the United States even as the death toll mounts, signaling an end to the pandemic's post-holiday surge and prompting some states to ease public health restrictions." A "slow but steady reduction in the number of Americans entering hospitals with the disease has paralleled a choppy rollout of vaccines that also are expected to reduce spread of the coronavirus." New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy "told CNN on Wednesday: 'We're starting to see the light at the end of the horizon.'"

New Jersey To Get Additional 30,000 COVID-19 Vaccine Doses Each Week For Next Three Weeks.

The Burlington County (NJ) Times (1/27, Fallon, 56K) reports, "New Jersey will be getting an increase of 30,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines each week for at least the next three weeks from the federal government as demand continues to far outpace supply statewide, officials said Wednesday." The 130,000 weekly doses "will be used for first and second shots for the general population at sites statewide that have been flooded with New Jerseyans seeking the vaccine, state Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli said."

The AP (1/27) also reports.

Iowa Dentists Could Administer COVID-19 Vaccine Under Legislative Bill.

The Hill (1/27, Choi, 5.69M) reports, "Iowa state lawmakers are considering a bill that would allow dentists to administer the coronavirus vaccine." If passed, dentists would be able to administer the vaccine after completing "four hours of additional training [related] to prescribing and administering vaccinations."

The Des Moines (IA) Register (1/26, Miller, 469K) reported that "the proposal, House Study Bill 71, received its first hearing at a House subcommittee Tuesday, but did not advance." Lawmakers "said they wanted more time to consider the measure before making a decision." State Rep. Steven Bradley (R), who is a dentist, said a decision would come "probably within the next week or two." Bradley supports dentists being able to administer the vaccine.

Older Coloradans Frustrated By Patchy Vaccine Distribution Process In State.

The Denver Post (1/27, Seaman, 660K) reports that it has "been almost a month since Coloradans 70 and older became eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, but the patchwork of distribution methods across the state – hospitals, county health departments, pharmacies at grocery stores – has left some of the most vulnerable residents confused and frustrated by the slow rollout." While distribution "has been led by states, the logistics of getting shots into people's arms in Colorado vary county to county, and in some cases, by vaccine provider. There is no statewide waiting list people can join to be inoculated."

Vermont Begins Giving Vaccinations To Residents 75 And Older.

The AP (1/27, Ring) reports that the COVID-19 "vaccination program for Vermonters who are 75 or older began Wednesday at a number of locations across the state." Registration "opened on Monday for people in the 75 and older age group and by Wednesday morning more than 29,000 people had signed up. Wednesday was when the actual vaccinations began."

Minnesota Has Begun Notifying Seniors Who Were Picked To Receive COVID-19 Vaccine.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune (1/27, Howatt, 855K) reports that Minnesota state officials "have begun notifying seniors who were picked to receive COVID-19 vaccines this week." More than "206,000 Minnesotans age 65 and over have registered to get the shot. That includes those who signed up on a state website or by phone Tuesday, as well as 11,000 who were on the waiting list from the previous week."

GOP Lawmakers Block Michigan Governor's Appointments, Threaten To Withhold Funding.

The Detroit Free Press (1/27, Boucher, 2.16M) reports, "Senate Republicans on Wednesday blocked the appointment of 13 people to state boards and commissions, political retribution aimed at Gov. Gretchen Whitmer apparently in response to state orders related to COVID-19 and vetoes." House Republicans "matched the political machinations, announcing a plan to withhold billions in federal funding for education unless the governor agrees to a law that would strip her and the health department of emergency health powers." Both moves "are intended as a political and legislative blow to the authority of the governor, but also likely indicate a prolonged fight that could delay providing billions of dollars in already approved assistance to residents who desperately need the help."

MLive (MI) (1/27, Gibbons, 828K) also reports.

North Carolina Governor Extends Coronavirus Restrictions, Eviction Moratorium.

The Charlotte (NC) Observer (1/27, Baumgartner Vaughan, Stradling, 443K) reports that North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper (D) "said Wednesday that restrictions on businesses and gatherings designed to prevent the spread of coronavirus will be extended again, as will a moratorium on evictions for people who can't pay their rent because of the pandemic." Cooper, "who announced the extension at a press conference Wednesday afternoon, said while the rise in coronavirus cases in the state has leveled off from a post-holiday surge, and vaccine is being administered, the numbers are still too high." The restrictions "extended Wednesday have been in effect since Oct. 2 under Phase 3 of the governor's three-phase plan to reopen the economy during the pandemic."

Also reporting are the Triad (NC) Business Journal (1/27, Joyce, Subscription Publication, 845K) and the Winston-Salem (NC) Journal (1/27, Craver, 226K).

South Dakota To Receive Additional COVID-19 Vaccine Doses In Coming Weeks.

The Sioux Falls (SD) Argus Leader (1/27, Ferguson, 173K) reports that South Dakota "is going to be receiving more COVID-19 vaccine doses in the coming weeks, the Department of Health said Wednesday." The state "will start to receive about 12,800 weekly doses next week, said Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon, up from the previous weeks' 11,000 doses." The increase "comes after the federal government changed distribution strategies and increased shipments to states, rather than keeping vials in reserve for second doses."

Houston-Area Officials Push Vaccine Communications To Latino Population.

The Houston Chronicle (1/27, Serrano, 982K) reports, "Once a week, volunteers hand out fliers in Spanish to those in cars lined up at a food distribution site in New Caney. Harris County officials post similar announcements and reminders in Spanish almost every day on social media." Those efforts "offer a glimpse into operations underway across the Houston region and country to distribute accurate information about COVID-19 to Latinos, from those who may not speak English as fluently as they speak Spanish to those who have been exposed to misinformation." Community organizers and advocates "say the information pushes are important as the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine slowly gains momentum."

Nevada Flooded With Applications From Small Businesses For Pandemic Relief.

The AP (1/27, Metz) reports that more than 4,300 small businesses in Nevada "have been approved to receive up to $10,000 each in pandemic relief grants to help keep pace with expenses like payroll, rent and utilities." When state Treasurer Zach Conine "began accepting applications for the program in October, his office was flooded with more than three times as many applicants as it had funding for." In a budget proposal "released last week, Gov. Steve Sisolak set aside $50 million in leftover coronavirus relief dollars to double funding for the program."

Illinois Governor Says Earlier Notice Of COVID-19 Vaccine Deliveries Should Help In Scheduling Appointments.

The Chicago Tribune (1/27, Munks, 2.03M) reports that Gov. J.B. Pritzker (D) "said Wednesday that the Biden administration's promise of earlier notifications about the number of doses of the coronavirus vaccine coming to states should make it easier for providers to schedule shots in advance." Pritzker "said during a Wednesday news conference in north suburban Grayslake: 'What they're saying is we're going to guarantee a minimum number and we're going to tell you that for the next three weeks, so you have at least that number of

appointments that you can make available to people.'" Previously, "state officials 'weren't being notified about how much vaccine we're going to receive on a weekly basis until a day or two before it was available,' Pritzker said."

Indiana To Get Additional 13K Vaccine Doses Per Week Soon, Governor Says.

The Indianapolis Star (1/27, Rudavsky, 662K) reports that Indiana "can expect to see an additional 13,000 or so vaccine doses a week soon, Gov. Eric Holcomb said Wednesday, a welcome increase of about 16% over current weekly shipments." While Indiana "is still moving cautiously to expand vaccine eligibility, Holcomb said it could be a matter of days before the state extends an invitation to those in the 65 to 69 age range to sign up for an appointment." The state "said that 51% of those 80 and older and 57% of those 70 and older have been vaccinated or are scheduled to receive" the vaccine.

Portland Region To Get Additional 17K Vaccine Doses, State Officials Say.

The AP (1/27, Cline) reports, "State officials announced Wednesday that an additional 17,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine will be allocated to Oregon's Portland metro region." The announcement "was made a day after Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington health officials said that 'tens of thousands' of 1A health care workers in the area have not been vaccinated and likely will not be for weeks, as there are not enough doses to go around for the increasing amount of people eligible for shots." Julie Sullivan-Springhetti, "the communications director of Multnomah County, said that Gov. Kate Brown told Tri-County health officials that they will receive an additional 17,000 doses – on top of the 15,000 area health officials were expecting – during the week of Feb. 1."

Los Angeles County Elementary Schools Could Be Eligible To Reopen In Two To Three Weeks.

The Los Angeles Times (1/27, Blume, 3.37M) reports, "Elementary school campuses in Los Angeles County could be eligible to reopen in two to three weeks if countywide infection rates continue to drop, county Public Health Department Director Barbara Ferrer told the L.A. City Council on Wednesday." Ferrer's comment, "made during a council briefing, referenced the coronavirus case rates that the state recently began using as the threshold to determine if schools would be eligible to reopen for in-person instruction."

Virginia, DC Announce Changes To Vaccine Distribution Processes.

The Washington Post (1/27, Portnoy, Zauzmer, Chason, 10.52M) reports, "Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam on Wednesday announced a flurry of coronavirus vaccine distribution and data reporting changes in the state, which has ranked among the worst-performing [states] for getting doses out, while the District streamlined its registration system for seniors trying to book appointments." Virginia "launched a new vaccination reporting website, changed the time it reports its data to better line up with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and will strengthen its efforts to have providers ask a person's race and ethnicity at the time of vaccination." In the District, officials Wednesday "also tweaked plans to vaccinate seniors, people with high-risk conditions, teachers and other essential workers as residents scramble to find scarce doses of the vaccine." In response to "complaints from frustrated seniors and D.C. lawmakers, the city announced technical changes to its online process for scheduling vaccine appointments."

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California Turns To Blue Shield For Oversight Of State's Vaccination Effort After Shaky Rollout.

The Los Angeles Times (1/27, Gutierrez, Myers, 3.37M) reports, "Following a shaky rollout of the state's COVID-19 vaccination efforts, advisors to Gov. Gavin Newsom have struck a far-reaching agreement with Blue Shield of California for the health insurance company to oversee the distribution of vaccine doses to counties, pharmacies and private healthcare providers." The decision "marks a sharp turn away from a more decentralized process that has been criticized for inconsistency across regions of the state and sluggishness in its effort to vaccinate Californians." It "will also mean the outsourcing of tasks that, until now, have been overseen by state and local government officials."

The AP (1/27, Har) and the San Francisco Chronicle (1/27, Koseff, 2.44M) also report on the story.

Los Angeles Mayor Receives First COVID-19 Vaccine Dose.

The Los Angeles Times (1/27, Smith, 3.37M) reports Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, 50, "is on the front lines of the pandemic response, according to aides" and "received a COVID-19 vaccination last Thursday." A spokesperson "said the mayor got his first dose after he spent five days at Dodger Stadium helping with the vaccination effort and 'directly interacting with hundreds of Angelenos each day.'"

Early Data Show COVID-19 Vaccines Are As Safe As Studies Suggested They Would Be.

USA Today (1/28, Weintraub, 12.7M) reports early safety data from the CDC during "the first month of COVID-19 vaccination [find] the shots are as safe as...studies suggested they'd be." According to the article, "Although the rate of severe allergic reactions is higher than in the general population, everyone with an allergic response [has] been treated successfully, and no other serious problems have turned up among the first 22 million people vaccinated." Data "collected from several tracking systems" indicate "the vaccines are not causing large numbers of unusual or dangerous results."

Opinion: Conspiracy Theorists, Anti-Vaxxers Are Not The Only Groups Skeptical Of COVID-19 Vaccine.

Contributor Sunita Sah, MD, PhD, writes in Forbes (1/28, 10.33M) that "it is tempting to dismiss those who refuse the" COVID-19 "vaccine as conspiracy theorists," but "conspiracy theorists and anti-vaxxers are not the only groups who are hesitant." She explains that even for those genuinely concerned about COVID-19, "mistrust in the vaccine itself...along with inconsistent messages from the government, has decreased intentions to take the vaccine." Furthermore, she adds, "Repeated studies show that marginalized ethnic minority populations are most at risk of infection and death from COVID, yet they are also the least likely to report that they plan to be vaccinated."

FDA Warns More Than Half Of Hand Sanitizers Coming From Mexico Contain Dangerous Levels Of Methanol.

The CBS Evening News (1/27, story 8, 0:30, O'Donnell, 6.92M) reported that the FDA on Wednesday night "put out an unprecedented alert that more than half of hand sanitizers coming from Mexico contain dangerous

levels of" methanol, "which can be deadly when ingested." The article adds, "Shipments of hand sanitizers from Mexico can now be detained by the FDA and will be subject to heightened scrutiny."

California To Broaden Bisphenol A Warning Labels After State Supreme Court Rejects Appeal.

The San Francisco Chronicle (1/27, Egelko, 2.44M) reports "California will broaden its warning labels for bisphenol A, a chemical widely used in plastic cups and other food and drink containers, after the state Supreme Court rejected an appeal by the chemical industry Wednesday." Since 2015, California "has required labels on products containing bisphenol A stating that it can cause reproductive harm in women." The high court's "order upholds state health officials' decision to require additional warnings of 'developmental toxicity,' or harm to fetuses and newborn and young children whose mothers are exposed to the chemical during pregnancy." The FDA "and the World Health Organization have both classified it as safe in the amounts normally contained in current products." The National Toxicology Program is mentioned.

Academic Interviewed About His "User's Guide" To Section 1498.

STAT (1/26, Silverman, 262K) reports Christopher Morten, deputy director of NYU's Technology Law and Policy Clinic, published a "user's guide" (PDF) to Section 1498, a federal law that allows the federal government to use patents and compensate owners. STAT interviewed Morten about the guide, how it differs from "march-in rights," and when the federal government should use the law to lower drug prices. During the interview, Morten discusses how during the Bush Administration, "HHS threatened to use Section 1498 to procure generic Cipro [ciprofloxacin] at a moment when Bayer had a patent on ciprofloxacin as quickly as possible, but limited manufacturing capacity."

Opinion: Experts Say Biden Administration Should Support Tobacco Harm Reduction.

Michael McGrady writes in an opinion in Inside Sources (1/27) about three experts' suggestions regarding how the Biden Administration "should approach tobacco harm reduction policies and the regulation of smoke-free products." Dr. David Abrams is a professor of social and behavioral sciences at New York University's School of Global Public Health, said, "In planning for the 'Cancer Moonshot,' the Biden administration must focus on preventing cancer, and incorporating harm reduction for those who smoke is an important start." Dr. Alex Wodak is the president of the Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation and a board member of the Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association, recommended a focus on "older smokers" complementing current tobacco control measures with efforts to ensure that "lower-risk options are available, accessible, affordable, attractive and safe."

Opinion: US Must Onshore Pharmaceutical Supply Chains To Ensure Safe, Reliable Access To Drugs.

In an opinion piece for Morning Consult (1/27, 3K), Michael Stumo, CEO of the Coalition for a Prosperous America, argues that to address critical drug shortages, a problem made more evident by the pandemic, we need to "bring pharmaceutical supply chains back to the United States and ensure that safe, quality prescription drugs and their ingredients are made at home."

Editorial: Big Tobacco's Response To Black Lives Matter Protests Is Hollow, Manipulative.

An editorial in the Duluth (MN) News Tribune (1/27, 137K) writes about Big Tobacco's response to Black Lives Matter protests. According to the editorial, "The second-largest manufacturer of large machine-made cigars and the makers of Copenhagen, Skoal, and other snuffs were among tobacco companies that put out statements pledging solidarity with the calls for social justice," and "offered millions to Black-owned businesses and job-training efforts in impoverished areas." The editorial says, "To those who've long paid attention to Big Tobacco's devious tactics, the gestures of seeming goodwill and generosity actually came off as hollow, self-serving, manipulative, and even offensive." The editorial notes that African-Americans are "more likely to die from smoking-related diseases than white people, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention."

Over One-Third Of Kentucky Middle, High Schoolers Say E-Cigarette Use Has Increased During Pandemic.

The Louisville (KY) Courier-Journal (1/27, Kobin, 554K) reports, "More than a third of Kentucky middle and high schoolers who responded to a recent survey said the COVID-19 pandemic has increased student usage of e-cigarettes, or 'vapes,' as well other tobacco products, officials from two nonprofits announced Wednesday." Moreover, "over 70% of the youth said they were in favor of local tobacco control, or giving cities and counties the option to pass laws that reduce tobacco use, according to the results of the survey conducted by the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky in partnership with Kentucky Youth Advocates." The CDC has said that "youth who use e-cigarettes may be more likely to smoke cigarettes in the future."

PMTA Included In Biden Administration's Freeze On Rules.

The Tobacco Reporter (1/27) reports, "The new U.S. administration has frozen all new and pending rules introduced in the last days of the Trump administration. Included in the freeze are the new finalized rules for premarket tobacco product applications (PMTA) and substantial equivalence (SE) that were announced on Jan. 19, the last full day of the Trump administration." The FDA's "CBD enforcement policy draft guidance, which had been under review at White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) since July, was also withdrawn."

Daily Lower-Dose Aspirin May Help Prevent A Second Pregnancy Loss, Analysis Suggests.

The New York Times (1/27, Bakalar, 20.6M) reports a new analysis of previously released study data suggests that "for women who have had a pregnancy loss," taking a daily 81-milligram tablet of aspirin may increase their changes of becoming pregnant again.

Researchers Develop Neuroprosthetic Device For Orthostatic Hypotension In Patients With Spinal Cord Injuries.

STAT (1/27, Gaffney, 262K) reports that researchers at the University of Calgary and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology have developed "a neuroprosthetic device that can replicate" orthostatic hypotension in patients with spinal cord injuries. Measuring only "a few centimeters in length, the implanted device imitates the body's baroreflex, stimulating the spine to trigger neural responses that affect blood pressure." While "such devices are already used to treat several types of pain unrelated to spinal cord injuries...this is the first time it's been used to address orthostatic hypotension."

IUD Containing Levonorgestrel May Work As Well As Morning-After Oral Contraceptives, Study Suggests.

The New York Times (1/27, Bakalar, 20.6M) reports research indicates that a "type of IUD, one containing the hormone levonorgestrel (Liletta and other brands), works as well as the copper IUD, and perhaps even better than the F.D.A.-approved oral pills for preventing pregnancy." For the study, investigators "tested the copper IUD against intrauterine levonorgestrel in a randomized trial" that "recruited 638 women seeking emergency contraception at three Utah family planning clinics." After one month, the study found "no pregnancies among women who used the copper IUD, and one among those who used the hormonal IUD." The findings were published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Alcohol Consumption Can Immediately Trigger AFib, Research Suggests.

CNN (1/27, LaMotte, 89.21M) reports, "The effects of alcohol on your heart can be immediate, triggering an irregular rhythm called atrial fibrillation or AFib, according to new state-of-the-art research" from University of California, San Francisco.

Firefighters Demand Independent Testing For Cancer-Linked Chemicals In Gear.

The New York Times (1/26, Tabuchi, 20.6M) reports that "firefighters are demanding independent testing for cancer-linked chemicals known as PFAS in their gear and that their union drop sponsorships from chemical and equipment makers." The article adds, "In October, two dozen firefighters in California...filed suit against 3M, Chemours, E.I. du Pont de Nemours and other manufacturers, claiming that the companies for decades knowingly made and sold firefighting equipment loaded with toxic chemicals without warning of the chemicals' risks." According to the article, "DuPont said it was 'disappointed' with firefighters seeking to ban sponsorships and that its commitment to the profession was 'unwavering.' 3M said it had 'acted responsibility' on PFAS and remained committed to working with the union. Chemours declined to comment."

Opinion: Federal Incentives, Alcohol Subsidies Add To Growing Health Burden.

In an opinion piece for STAT (1/27, 262K), Nandita Murukutla, vice president for global policy and research at Vital Strategies, and Rebecca Perl, vice president for partnerships and initiatives at Vital Strategies, write, "A new report from Vital Strategies...exposes how the alcohol industry, like the tobacco and fossil fuel industries, benefits from billions of dollars it gets in financial incentives and alcohol subsidies from governments and development agencies to increase its reach and profits." They claim that "these incentives, which are used to produce, market, and sell alcohol, contribute to a growing health burden."

HHS Cancels Last-Minute Trump Plan To Let More Physicians Prescribe Opioid-Treatment Drug.

The Washington Post (1/27, Diamond, 10.52M) reports that the Biden Administration "said Wednesday that it is canceling a last-minute plan by the Trump administration to let more physicians prescribe an opioid-treatment drug, despite exhortations from lawmakers and physician groups to keep it." The White House's drug policy office "said in a message obtained by The Washington Post: 'On January 14, 2021, HHS announced forthcoming Practice Guidelines for the Administration of Buprenorphine for Treating Opioid Use Disorder. Unfortunately, the

announcement was made prematurely. Therefore, the Guidelines previously announced cannot be issued at this time.'"

Medical Societies, Advocacy Groups Urge Officials To Dedicate Opioid Settlement Funds For Substance Use Disorder Treatment.

STAT (1/27, Silverman, 262K) reports, "As state and local governments consider how to spend proceeds from settlements with opioid makers, a coalition of medical societies and advocacy groups is urging public officials to create dedicated funds to help people with substance use disorders, rather than fix holes in their budgets."

AHA Urges CMS To Withdraw The "Most Favored Nation" Drug-Pricing Rule.

Modern Healthcare (1/27, Brady, Subscription Publication, 215K) reports the American Hospital Association (AHA) wants CMS to "withdraw" the Trump Administration's "most favored nation" drug-pricing rule "and replace it with a serious effort at drug pricing reform." The rule would tie how much the Medicare Part B pays for prescription drugs "to drug prices in other wealthy countries." The AHA argues the rule would "harm patients' access to critical, lifesaving drugs."

Healthcare Finance News (1/27, Hackett, 93K) reports that "in addition to raising concerns with the most favored nation model, AHA touched on strategies deployed by other agencies to lower drug prices. It applauded the Food and Drug Administration's work in placing more generic drugs and biosimilar products on the market and urged the Department of Health and Human Services to more closely regulate anti-competitive practices of drug manufacturers."

Group Including Former CMS, FDA Heads Suggests Drug Pricing Policies For Biden Administration.

Inside Health Policy (1/27, Wanneh, Subscription Publication) reports, "A bipartisan group of top government health officials representing the National Academy of Medicine are recommending FDA and CMS policies that the Biden administration could use to control drug prices." Group members, including "two former CMS administrators and a former FDA chief, suggest that CMS test new Medicare Part B policies, outcome-based payments and reference pricing, and that FDA adopt policies to speed generic drug and biosimilar access, and gather more real-world evidence to help insurers compare drugs' cost-effectiveness."

Biden Administration Asks For Additional 60 Days To Respond To Lawsuit Against Trump Administration's Drug Import Rule.

Inside Health Policy (1/27, Wilkerson, Subscription Publication) reports "the Biden administration on Tuesday (Jan. 26) requested an extra 60 days to respond to the drug industry's lawsuit against the Trump administration's drug import rule." President "Biden supports letting individuals import drugs, but it remains to be seen whether the new administration will put up a strong legal defense of the Trump administration's import rule."

Primary Care Physicians Among The Last In Line To Receive, Distribute COVID-19 Vaccines.

USA Today (1/28, Callahan, 12.7M) reports, "Many primary care physicians and their patients have been left in the dark" when it comes to the COVID-19 vaccine. The article adds, "Thousands of calls have flooded private

doctors' offices across Pennsylvania since the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine," but "primary care physicians who aren't affiliated with hospitals are among the last in line to receive and distribute the vaccine to patients, medical leaders say." Vaccine rollout has been left largely "to the states and public health departments, and Pennsylvania, like many states, is relying on hospitals to be the main distribution points." Furthermore, "only a fraction of the vaccines distributed so far have gone to primary care physicians, according to the state's list of approved providers."

Global Health News

WHO Team Emerges From Quarantine To Investigate Coronavirus Origins In Wuhan.

The AP (1/28, Wang Fujiyama) reports, "A World Health Organization team emerged from quarantine in the Chinese city of Wuhan on Thursday to start field work in a fact-finding mission on the origins of the virus that caused the COVID-19 pandemic." The researchers, who "were required to complete 14 days in quarantine after arriving in China," will continue their mission, which "has become politically charged, as China seeks to avoid blame for alleged missteps in its early response to the outbreak."

WHO Advises Against Pregnant Women Receiving The Moderna Coronavirus Vaccine.

The Hill (1/27, Lonas, 5.69M) reports the WHO recommended that pregnant women not receive the "Moderna coronavirus vaccine unless they are a health care worker or have preexisting conditions." The WHO said on its website, "While pregnancy puts women at a higher risk of severe COVID-19, the use of this vaccine in pregnant women is currently not recommended, unless they are at risk of high exposure (e.g. health workers)."

Fox News (1/27, Farber, 23.99M) and the Wall Street Journal (1/27, Toy, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) also covers the story.

AstraZeneca UK Vaccine Partner Says Production Schedules For Shot Have Not Been Affected After Getting Suspicious Package.

Reuters (1/27, Smout, Holden) reports, "A suspicious package at an AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine plant has been made safe and production schedules of the shots have not been affected, the company Wockhardt UK said on Wednesday." Wockhardt UK stated, "This temporary suspension of manufacturing has in no way affected our production schedule and we are grateful to the authorities and experts for their swift response and resolution of the incident."

The AP (1/27) also reports.

WHO Emergencies Chief Says COVID-19 Vaccines Can Likely Be Adapted Quickly To Address Mutations.

Reuters (1/27, Chander, Neghaiwi, Banerjee) reports, "It should be possible to adapt coronavirus vaccines quickly if they lose their effectiveness against mutations, World Health Organization (WHO) emergencies chief Mike Ryan said on Wednesday" during a social media question and answer session. Ryan said, "We can adapt those vaccines, and I believe we can adapt those vaccines quickly."

EU Urges AstraZeneca To Abide By Vaccine Supply Commitments.

Reuters (1/27, Guarascio, Burger) reports that the European Union is "pushing AstraZeneca to supply the bloc with more doses of its COVID-19 vaccine...after the company announced delivery delays." According to Reuters, "The EU is making more comprehensive checks on vaccines before approval, which means a slower rollout of shots compared with some other regions, especially former EU member Britain." At a news conference EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides said, "UK factories are part of our advanced purchase agreement and that is why they have to deliver." She noted "that two of the four factories from which AstraZeneca has committed to providing vaccines to the EU are in Britain." AstraZeneca, "which partnered with Britain's Oxford University to develop its vaccine, said last week it would cut supplies to the EU in the first quarter, with an EU official saying that meant the EU would receive 31 million doses in the period, or 60% less than initially agreed, due to production issues at a Belgian factory."

The Washington Post (1/27, Cunningham, Schemm, 10.52M) reports that "the high-stakes clash between the E.U. and AstraZeneca intensified Wednesday when E.U. officials accused the company of withdrawing from a planned meeting to discuss cuts to its supply." Bloomberg (1/27, Ring, Stearns, Chrysoloras, 3.57M), the AP (1/27, Casert, Petrequin, Kirka), the Wall Street Journal (1/27, Pancevski, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), The Hill (1/27, Lonas, 5.69M), and Politico Europe (1/27, 15K) also cover the dispute over distribution of the vaccine.

EU Nations' COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Going Slowly So Far.

The AP (1/27, Casert, Corder) reports, "Overall, the 27-nation EU, a collection of many of the richest countries in the world – most with a universal health care system to boot – is not faring well in comparison to countries like Israel and the United Kingdom." Vaccine "supply isn't the only thing holding up the EU's campaign." The issue "is partially that the EU Commission bet on the wrong horse – and didn't get enough doses of the early success vaccines like Pfizer-BioNTech." For its part, "The commission notes there was no way of knowing which vaccines would succeed – and which would be first – and so it had to spread its orders out over several companies." Moreover, "the EU rollout was also slowed because the European Medicines Agency took more time than the U.S. or U.K. regulators to authorize its first vaccine."

Cyprus To Begin Easing COVID-19 Lockdown Measures Next Month.

The AP (1/27) reports, "A steady decrease in new coronavirus infections three weeks into Cyprus' nationwide lockdown is allowing for the start of the gradual, targeted lifting of closures and restrictions, the country's health minister said Wednesday."

Tanzania's President Casts Doubt On COVID-19 Vaccines.

The AP (1/27, Odula) reports, "Tanzania's president on Wednesday openly expressed doubt about COVID-19 vaccines and accusing people who were vaccinated outside the East African nation of bringing new infections into the country." The leader "also warned against Tanzanians being used as 'guinea pigs' for the vaccines." Other powers "in the country, including the Catholic church, appear to be pushing back as parts of the African continent see a strong second surge in virus infections."

COVID-19 Lockdown In England Will Remain In Place Until Early March, Johnson Says.

The AP (1/27) reports, "British Prime Minister Boris Johnson indicated Wednesday that the coronavirus lockdown in England will remain in place until at least March 8 as he ruled out any imminent return to school for most

students." He "also confirmed new restrictions for travelers arriving in England from countries where the government thinks there is a risk of known variants of the coronavirus."

Reuters (1/27, Bruce, Holden) also reports.

South Africa Prepares To Roll Out COVID-19 Vaccine To Healthcare Workers.

The AP (1/27, Meldrum) reports, "Battling a COVID-19 resurgence driven by a more infectious variant, South Africa is preparing to roll out its first vaccines to frontline healthcare workers." An initial "delivery of 1 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine is expected to arrive imminently at Johannesburg's international airport and there are plans for jabs to be given to doctors and nurses starting next week." The country's "Health Minister Zweli Mkhize has said South Africa intends to vaccinate 67% of its 60 million people in 2021, starting with the most vulnerable health workers."

Reuters (1/27, Winning) reports, "South Africa expects the flight carrying its first 1 million coronavirus vaccine doses to arrive on Feb. 1, Health Minister Zweli Mkhize said on Wednesday, boosting efforts to curb a second wave of COVID-19 driven by a more contagious variant."

Holocaust Survivors In Austria, Slovakia Get First Dose Of COVID-19 Vaccines.

The AP (1/27, Grieshaber, Jenne) reports, "Hundreds of Holocaust survivors in Austria and Slovakia got their first dose of a coronavirus vaccine Wednesday, an acknowledgment of past suffering and a tribute to resilience 76 years after Soviet troops liberated the Auschwitz death camp in Nazi-occupied Poland."

Reuters (1/27, Stoklasa) also reports.

Spain Running Out Of COVID-19 Vaccines, Health Authorities Warn.

The AP (1/27, Wilson) reports, "Health authorities in Spain say they are running out of COVID-19 vaccines and will have to postpone giving shots to health workers and nursing home residents due to delays in deliveries by pharmaceutical companies." Specifically, "Catalonia's public health chief Josep Argimon said Wednesday that the northeast region that is home to Barcelona will have used up all its available vaccines by Friday, when its 'refrigerators will be empty.'"

Calmer Night Of Protests Against COVID-19 Measures In Netherlands Despite 131 Arrests, Police Say.

The AP (1/27, Corder) reports, "Dutch police said Wednesday that the fourth night of the Netherlands' coronavirus curfew passed more peacefully than the previous three nights marred by rioting." Still, "officers arrested 131 people, mainly for public order offenses and incitement."

Israel's Early COVID-19 Vaccination Success Threatened By New Coronavirus Variants.

Reuters (1/27, Williams) reports, "Israel's plan to parlay its COVID-19 vaccination drive into an exit from the pandemic next month hangs in the balance as new variants of the virus have spurred an increase in infections, a senior official said on Wednesday." New "highly infectious foreign variants are currently flooding Israeli hospitals with serious cases and the newly developed vaccines have yet to be proven fully effective against them, Deputy Health Minister Yoav Kisch said."

China Rolls Out Anal Swab COVID-19 Test.

Washington Post (1/27, Dou, 10.52M) reports that Chinese authorities are rolling out anal swab COVID-19 tests prompting widespread discussion and some outrage. Some Chinese physicians say the method is more accurate than throat swabs. Additionally, they say that recovering patients have continued to test positive through samples from the lower digestive tract days after nasal and throat swabs came back negative.

Bloomberg (1/27, Liu, Che, Dong, Hong, 3.57M) reports, "While there's no nationwide policy on use of the technique, some residents in China's northern regions – where more than 1,700 cases have emerged – have been subjected to the swabs with little warning." The new "method involves the insertion of a saline-soaked cotton swab about two-to-three centimeters into the anus, with the sample then tested for active traces of the virus."

Reuters (1/27, Woo, Zhang) and Forbes (1/27, Hart, 10.33M) also report.

Hong Kong Setting Up 18 Community Vaccination Centers For Pfizer's COVID-19 Shot.

Bloomberg (1/27, Hong, 3.57M) reports, "Hong Kong will set up 18 community vaccination centers – one in every district – to each handle at least 2,000 residents a day as the city prepares to administer the Covid-19 shot developed by BioNTech SE and Pfizer Inc. as early as the end of February." These new "centers will only handle the BioNTech vaccine, while the other two shots the city has ordered – from Sinovac Biotech Ltd. and AstraZeneca Plc – will be distributed to private hospitals and clinics, according to Thomas Tsang, a member of Hong Kong's vaccination program task force."

International Olympic Committee Gaining Confidence Tokyo Games Will Be Held This Summer.

Bloomberg (1/27, Baschuk, 3.57M) reports, "The International Olympic Committee said it's gaining confidence that it will be possible to hold the Tokyo games in July, as work on a safety 'playbook' nears a conclusion." President Thomas Bach said during a news conference, "We are gaining even more confidence from the effectiveness of the countermeasures which are being applied at sports events right now around the world."

The Washington Post (1/27, Maese, 10.52M) also reports.

Tokyo Olympics Organizers Seek Help From Biden Administration. The Wall Street Journal (1/27, Gale, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that organizers of the Summer Olympics in Tokyo are refuting conjecture that the Games will have to be cancelled and officials are seeking assistance from the Biden Administration to ensure the games proceed.

Politico (1/27, Leonard, 6.73M) reports, "Organizers calling for President Joe Biden's support for the Tokyo Olympics have largely gotten silence from his administration, amid speculation that the summer games could be called off because of the coronavirus pandemic." Although "White House press secretary Jen Psaki has been asked multiple times about whether the president thinks the Olympics...would be safe...she hasn't given an answer." She said, "I haven't had much on it, but I don't have anything more than I've had on other days on it. ... I haven't had a chance to talk with him specifically about it."

Africa Faces More Lethal COVID-19 Wave.

The Wall Street Journal (1/27, Parkinson, Steinhauser, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that Africa, having largely avoided the worst of the pandemic so far could face an even and more lethal COVID-19 surge.

Guam Plans To Extend COVID-19 Vaccination Eligibility To Child Care Workers.

The AP (1/27) reports, "The Guam Department of Public Health and Social Services announced plans to extend coronavirus vaccination eligibility to child care workers."

Most People In Israel Can Still Be Infected By Coronavirus After Initial Dose Of Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine, Study Suggests.

Forbes (1/27, 10.33M) contributor William A. Haseltine writes that Israel released preliminary data suggesting "as many as 70% of people can still be infected by SARS-CoV-2 after the initial dose of the Pfizer vaccine." Haseltine stresses the difference "between infection and disease," pointing out that "the Pfizer vaccine referenced in this study has efficacy of greater than 90% at preventing Covid-19 related symptoms." He explains "that vaccines do not...guarantee protection from infection, and a vaccinated person can still become infected." The study here "aims to answer how vaccination affects the infectivity of the virus for vaccinated people, not whether the vaccine is efficacious."

Chile Approves AstraZeneca's COVID-19 Vaccine.

Reuters (1/27, Laing, Ramos Miranda) reports, "Chile's health regulator on Wednesday approved the AstraZeneca-Oxford COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use among its population by a unanimous vote of its advisory board."

Humanitarian Disaster Unfolding In Manaus As New Coronavirus Variant Spreads.

The Washington Post (1/27, McCoy, 10.52M) reports, "The humanitarian disaster unfolding in the Amazon's largest city [Manaus] has shown what happens when government failures, scientific misfires and public indifference meet a new, possibly more dangerous variant of the virus that has ravaged the globe." Thought "to have been circulating in the Amazon since December, P.1 now appears to be the dominant coronavirus strain in Manaus." Scientists are trying to determine whether the new variant "truly is more transmissible or has simply exploited lax behavior in a region where many people are either unable or unwilling to take precautions against the virus." For now, "the biggest unknown is whether the variant can infect people who have recovered from the more common coronavirus strain."

COVID-19 Has Killed Over 260 Physicians In Peru.

The AP (1/27, Cano, Muñoz) reports, "More than 260 doctors have died from the virus in Peru." The physicians' "colleagues blame the deaths on a lack of proper personal protective equipment and what they say is the government's abandonment of the health care system." This month "alone, the virus has killed at least 10 doctors, five of whom worked in the capital of Lima."

Over One Million COVID-19 Deaths In North And South America, PAHO Says.

Reuters (1/27, Boadle) reports, "Over 1 million people have died from COVID-19 in North and South America, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said on Wednesday."

Brazilian Lawmaker Says Pandemic Not Enough To Impeach Bolsonaro.

Reuters (1/27) reports, "The Brazilian lawmaker who President Jair Bolsonaro is backing to lead the lower house of Congress said on Wednesday that the country's coronavirus pandemic should not be politicized and was not a good enough reason to impeach the right-wing leader." The suggestion "by center-right Congressman Arthur Lira, widely expected to be elected the new head of the lower house, underline the uphill battle faced by those hoping to impeach Bolsonaro over his handling of the pandemic."

Johnson Receives Criticism For Comments Defending British Government's COVID-19 Response.

The Washington Post (1/27, Adam, Booth, 10.52M) reports, "After Prime Minister Boris Johnson said his government had truly done 'everything we could' to save the 100,000 lives taken by the coronavirus so far in Britain, a broad swath of scientists, public health experts, opposition politicians and ordinary citizens heaped scorn on the prideful assertion." The Prime Minister "rightly boasted in Parliament on Wednesday that Britain is a world leader at rolling out vaccines...but Johnson's critics stress that Britain on many days also posts the highest per capita death toll in the world."

British Government Faces Legal Fight Over COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.

Bloomberg (1/27, Browning, 3.57M) reports, "The U.K. government faces a legal fight over its Covid-19 vaccine rollout, after two people with learning disabilities filed a suit calling for a rethink to the priority list." The vaccines "should be provided on an equal basis with other highly clinically vulnerable individuals, lawyers for the pair said in a statement Wednesday." UK's "health minister failed to consider that people with learning disabilities were particularly at risk from dying from the virus, the lawyers at Bindmans said."

South Africa Approves Anti-Parasite Drug For Use In Patients With COVID-19.

Bloomberg (1/27, Kew, 3.57M) reports that South African authorities approved use, on compassionate grounds in a controlled-access program, of ivermectin, "a drug used to control parasites in humans and livestock, to treat coronavirus patients."

New Zealand, Vietnam, Taiwan Rank Highest On COVID Performance Index.

Reuters (1/27, Pandey) reports, "New Zealand, Vietnam and Taiwan rank the top three in a COVID Performance Index of almost 100 countries for their successful handling of the coronavirus pandemic, with Britain and America near the bottom of the pile."

Airline Industry Urges WHO To Say People Can Safely Fly Without Quarantining After COVID-19 Vaccination.

Bloomberg (1/27, Jasper, 3.57M) reports, "The airline industry has called on the World Health Organization to rule it's safe for people to fly without quarantining once they've had a coronavirus vaccine." Acknowledging "that principle from the United Nations agency is vital to the development of a digital-travel pass aimed at getting people moving again once infection rates ease, the International Air Transport Association said Wednesday."

India Says It Has Contained COVID-19, Reporting No New Cases In A Fifth Of Its Districts For One Week.

Reuters (1/28, Das) reports, "India said on Thursday it had curbed an increase in COVID-19 infections, with a fifth of its districts reporting no new cases for a week" as some studies suggest "pockets of India have attained herd immunity through natural infection." Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said, "'India has successfully contained the pandemic,' noting that fewer than 12,000 cases were reported in the past 24 hours." Meanwhile, India "started its COVID-19 immunisation programme on Jan. 16, with the aim to reach 300 million people by July-August."

GSK To Shift Production Of Malaria Vaccine To Bharat Biotech.

Reuters (1/27, Aripaka) reports GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) "will shift production of the world's first effective malaria vaccine to Indian COVID-19 vaccine developer Bharat Biotech, as part of global efforts to battle the deadly fever, the drugmakers said on Wednesday." The deal includes the "transfer of manufacturing of the protein part of the vaccine, RTS, S/AS01, while GSK will continue to supply Bharat Biotech with the adjuvant or vaccine booster for the shot." Developed by GSK with nonprofit group PATH, the vaccine "is currently being administered under a special World Health Organization-backed scheme in Ghana, Kenya, and Malawi."

Poland's Top Court Confirms Recent Ruling Tightening Abortion Laws.

The AP (1/27) reports, "Poland's top court on Wednesday confirmed its highly divisive ruling that will further tighten the predominantly Catholic nation's strict anti-abortion law and that triggered weeks of protests after it was first announced in October."

The New York Times (1/27, Kwai, Pronczuk, Magdziarz, 20.6M) also reports.

Thailand Legislators Vote To Make Abortion Legal In First Trimester.

The New York Times (1/28, Suhartono, Ives, 20.6M) reports that "in what abortion rights advocates called a partial victory, Thailand's Parliament has voted to make the procedure legal in the first trimester, while keeping penalties in place for women who undergo it later in their pregnancies." Senate legislators "voted 166 to 7 on Monday to amend a law that had imposed prison terms of up to three years for anyone having an abortion, and up to five years for those who perform one." The updated "version allows any woman to end a pregnancy in the first 12 weeks."

EU To Recommend Countries Introduce Vaping Bans For Public Places.

The Telegraph (UK) (1/27, Crisp, 249K) reports, "The European Commission will recommend EU countries introduce new rules to ban vaping in public places as part of a push to ensure only 5 percent of the bloc's population uses tobacco by 2040." According to "the plans, the EU would also stop public money being used to promote red and processed meat and cancel subsidies to market alcohol."

HHS in the News

Hundreds Of Millions In Funds Allocated For Biomedical Research At HHS Diverted For Other Purposes, Investigation Concludes.

The Washington Post (1/27, Diamond, Rein, 10.52M) reports, "Federal officials repeatedly raided a fund earmarked for biomedical research in the years leading up to the covid-19 pandemic, spending millions of dollars on unrelated salaries, administrative expenses and even the cost of removing office furniture, according to the findings of an investigation into a whistleblower complaint shared with The Washington Post." This probe, which was conducted by the HHS-OIG "and overseen by the Office of Special Counsel, centered on hundreds of millions of dollars intended for the development of vaccines, drugs and therapies by the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority or BARDA, an arm of the federal health department."

The New York Times (1/27, Stolberg, 20.6M) says, "The 223-page report, issued Wednesday by the Office of Special Counsel, found that the Department of Health and Human Services diverted millions of taxpayer dollars intended for BARDA to finance vaccine research and pandemic preparedness into other government activities, and failed to inform Congress – a potential violation of federal law."

Bloomberg (1/27, Korte, 3.57M) reports the "anonymous whistle-blower tipped off authorities" that instead of funds being used for BARDA, "millions went to pay for other expenses at the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, including the removal of furniture, news subscriptions, and unrelated salaries, legal services and administrative expenses." It is unknown precisely how much was misspent, "but inspectors said the agency couldn't adequately account for $517.8 million from 2007 to 2016." In addition, about $25 million "was improperly taken from BARDA" in the 2019 fiscal year.

ABC News (1/27, Pezenik, 2.44M) reports, "The practice of using funds from BARDA, part of the federal health department, for non-BARDA purposes was 'so common, there was even a name for it within the agency: 'Bank of BARDA,' OSC's release said."

CNBC (1/27, Feuer, 7.34M) reports that special counsel Henry J. Kerner stated, "I am deeply concerned about (the) apparent misuse of millions of dollars in funding meant for public health emergencies like the one our country is currently facing with the COVID-19 pandemic. ... Equally concerning is how widespread and well-known this practice appeared to be for nearly a decade, even garnering the nickname 'Bank of BARDA.'"

Among other news outlets covering the story are CNN (1/27, Cole, 89.21M), The Hill (1/27, Hellmann, 5.69M), Forbes (1/27, Sandler, 10.33M), Newsweek (1/27, Garrett, 2.67M), Axios (1/27, Fernandez, 1.26M), the Daily Caller (1/27, Housman, 375K), and the Fiscal Times (1/27, Rosenberg).

House Panel Investigating Trump Administration's Purchase Of $70M Worth Of Inadequate Ventilators.

The Washington Post (1/27, Albergotti, Gregg, 10.52M) reports a House subcommittee is looking into "a government deal to buy $70 million worth of ventilators for the coronavirus pandemic response that a Washington Post investigation found were inadequate for treating most covid-19 patients." According to the Post, "Last spring, as part of its effort to increase the number of ventilators amid the crisis, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Defense Logistics Agency purchased 11,200 AutoMedx SAVe II+ ventilators from Combat Medical Systems, which distributes the devices." However, "the ventilators were inadequate for treating covid-19 patients and remain in warehouses." The panel is requesting "any communication related to the principals at the company, as well as prominent Trump administration officials such as former president Donald

Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner; former health and human services secretary Alex Azar; and adviser Peter Navarro."

The Hill (1/27, 5.69M) also covers the story.

CDC Says More Than 20M Americans Have Received At Least One Dose Of COVID-19 Vaccine.

The Washington Examiner (1/27, Hogberg, 888K) reports more than "20 million Americans have now been vaccinated for the coronavirus, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention," which said 20,687,970 people have been given at least a dose of either Pfizer's or Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine. This "milestone was reached nearly a month late. On Dec. 9, then-Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar said that 20 million people would be vaccinated by the end of 2020."

Nevada Leaders Say COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign Will Soon Be Improved.

The Reno (NV) Gazette-Journal (1/27, Oh, 219K) reports "Nevada is still trailing much of the nation when it comes to vaccinating its population, but state leaders say that will soon change." Nevada "will begin to see an increase in the availability for the Moderna vaccine in its ordering system, said Candice McDaniel, a public health official with the state." McDaniel "said officials are still waiting for the system to update order availability for the Pfizer vaccine." The Gazette-Journal adds that Gov. Steve Sisolak (D) "wrote a letter to the acting Health and Human Services Secretary, Norris Cochran, regarding Nevada's allocation for the COVID-19 vaccine."

During First Biden Administration COVID-19 Briefing, White House Commits To Sending Each State 10M Vaccine Doses Per Week.

Fox News (1/27, Singman, 23.99M) reports that on Wednesday, the Biden Administration held its first White House COVID-19 briefing. During the event, the White House Coronavirus Task Force committed "to sending 10 million doses per week to each state for the next three weeks, saying they are hitting their target of administering an average of 1 million COVID-19 vaccines per day." Task force members outlined "their strategy to accelerate the availability and administration of vaccines and said that they are on track to meet the president's goal of vaccinating 100 million Americans by his 100th day in office in April."

The Daily Caller (1/27, Hagstrom, 375K) reports during the briefing, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said the United States "has its first case of the new COVID strain originating from Brazil and has more than 300 cases of the U.K. strain."

The Hill (1/27, Bowden, 5.69M) reports, "Connection issues and other annoyances interrupted the Biden administration's first Zoom-based COVID-19 task force briefing on Wednesday." People who were watching "the roughly hourlong briefing sat through numerous technical difficulties over the course of the broadcast, as White House COVID-19 response coordinator Jeff Zients was forced on multiple occasions to assist participants with their devices and in some cases repeat questions from reporters to participants who could not hear them."

The New York Post (1/27, Golding, 7.45M) and the Washington Examiner (1/27, Crilly, 888K) also cover the story.

CDC Mulling COVID-19 Testing For Domestic Air Travel, Official Says.

USA Today (1/27, Gilbertson, 12.7M) reports Martin Cetron, director of the CDC's Division of Global Migration and Quarantine, said the agency is "actively looking at" requiring negative COVID-19 tests for domestic air travel. The article says the US is requiring all international travelers to the US to provide a negative COVID-19 test within three days of flying. The piece suggests officials may consider how Hawaii has handled its testing policy, under which travelers are allowed to bypass mandatory quarantines if they provide a negative test before traveling.

Researchers Say In-Person School Instruction Can Be Safe; Teachers Still Demanding Vaccinations Before Returning To Classrooms.

USA Today (1/27, Hauck, 12.7M) reports "in-person schooling can be safe, U.S. health researchers argue, but it requires schools and their surrounding communities to commit to a slew of public health precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19." On Tuesday, USA Today says, "two epidemiologists and a researcher from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published an opinion piece in the Journal of the American Medical Association, writing that 'accumulating data now suggest a path forward to maintain or return primarily or fully to in-person instructional delivery.'" As US schools, as well as schools in different countries, "have reopened amid the pandemic, there 'has been little evidence that schools have contributed meaningfully to increased community transmission,' the scientists said."

ABC World News Tonight (1/27, lead story, 3:50, Muir, 7.45M) reported that "teachers in some places" are demanding COVID-19 vaccinations before they return to the classroom, despite a "CDC study saying opening schools with proper guidelines is safer than first thought." The broadcast added that CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said about COVID-19 variants, "They're more transmissible, which can lead to [an] increased number of cases and increased stress on our already taxed healthcare system."

The CBS Evening News (1/27, story 2, 2:10, O'Donnell, 6.92M) reported the White House "says it will develop nationwide standards for when it is considered safe to reopen schools." Meanwhile, "the CDC says there is little evidence that in-person learning leads to spread in the community, if proper precautions are taken."

The Daily Caller (1/27, Catenacci, 375K) reports "the two largest national teachers unions in the U.S. still oppose immediately reopening schools despite the recent" CDC "study that suggested schools aren't drivers of coronavirus transmission." The American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association "didn't change their views on school reopenings after the" agency "released a study Tuesday that suggested in-person instruction is safe."

Texas Officials Say Number Of Patients With COVID-19 Still "Big Concern" Despite Drop In Hospitalizations.

The Austin (TX) American Statesman (1/27, Cobler, Subscription Publication, 261K) reports that in Texas, COVID-19 "hospitalizations have declined 9.6% over the past two weeks...but state health officials warn that the number of COVID-19 patients is still a 'big concern.'" Texas hospitals "continue to report that intensive care unit beds are in critically short supply, raising concerns that they'll be unable to treat Texans with the coronavirus or other illnesses." The state's "seven-day average of new cases...has declined, mirroring a dip in new cases nationally, but" state health department spokesman Chris "Van Deusen said Texans should remain concerned about overwhelmed hospitals and intensive care units." Former FDA Commissioner Mark McClellan "estimated that the pandemic could look better by March, but 'it's not a sure thing.'"

White House Health Officials Shed Light On Why COVID-19 Vaccines Delivered To States Have Not Been Used.

CNN (1/27, Bonifield, 89.21M) reports, "A possible explanation is emerging for why federal data [show] only about half of the vaccine supply delivered in the US has been administered." The nation's coronavirus vaccine distribution figures "have baffled observers for weeks, with states claiming they need more vaccine when the data [indicate] they still have many doses on hand." Health officials for President Biden "sought to explain on Wednesday, at least in part." CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky "said not all vaccine that's been delivered to states is available for 'inserting into people's arms,'" while White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator Jeff Zients "said, 'I think it's important that when you're looking at state's inventories that you recognize that some of that inventory is being held for the very important second shot.'"

Investment, Collaboration In Diagnostic Tools Will Be Critical For Targeting Patients Who Have COVID-19 Long Term, Acting FDA Head Says.

Bloomberg Law (1/27, Cutler, Subscription Publication, 4K) reports, "Investment and collaboration in diagnostic tools will be critical to helping identify and produce more targeted treatments for patients recovering from the coronavirus, acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock said" Wednesday during the Precision Medicine World Conference. Furthermore, "finding the predictive markers to determine who will have serious post-infection risks...is one hurdle in the fight against Covid-19 as the number of global infections approaches 101 million, Woodcock said."

Analysis Explains Why Demand For Coronavirus Vaccines Is Outpacing Supplies Worldwide.

In an analysis, the AP (1/28, Neergaard) says that "with demand for COVID-19 vaccines outpacing the world's supplies, a frustrated public and policymakers want to know: How can we get more? A lot more. Right away." COVID-19 vaccine producers "need everything to go right as they scale up production to hundreds of millions of doses – and any little hiccup could cause a delay." Some vaccine "ingredients have never before been produced at the sheer volume needed." Furthermore, "seemingly simple suggestions that other factories switch to brewing new kinds of vaccines can't happen overnight." Former FDA vaccine chief Norman Baylor said that when using biological ingredients, "there are things that can go wrong and will go wrong."

Columnist: Coronavirus Variants Mean Worst Of Pandemic Could Be Yet To Come.

New York Times (1/28, Klein, 20.6M) columnist Ezra Klein says "the B.1.1.7 variant of coronavirus, first seen in Britain, and now spreading throughout Europe, appears to be 30 to 70 percent more contagious, and it may be more lethal, too." Klein says the US "is doing embarrassingly little genomic testing, but even the paltry surveillance that is being conducted has confirmed epidemiologists' fears: B.1.1.7 is here, too." Klein asserts "this is the part of the horror film where a happy ending seems in sight, but it is obvious, to those paying attention, that the monster is not dead, and that the worst may be yet to come. We cannot let ourselves be taken by surprise." The FDA has "been disastrously slow in approving" rapid, at-home "tests and have held them to a standard more appropriate to doctor's offices." Surgeon General Nominee Vivek Murthy said about the FDA's caution, "I do think we've been too conservative."

Biden Administration Reportedly Delaying Executive Orders On Immigration, Including Task Force To Reunite Families.

NBC News (1/28, Ainsley, Soboroff, Bennett, 4.91M) reports the Biden Administration "is likely to delay its roll out of a string of executive orders on immigration, including the long-awaited announcement of a task force to reunite migrant families separated under the Trump administration, according to two sources familiar with the discussions." Sources say they have been delayed "by at least a few days" in plans to release an executive action on immigration. The article adds, "When the task force is announced, it is expected to be an inter-agency effort across the Department of Homeland Security, Health and Human Services and the State Department, led by Biden's pick to run DHS, Alejandro Mayorkas, according to three sources familiar with the planning."

Information Blocking Remains Prevalent Among EHR Vendors, Health Systems, Study Indicates.

MedCity News (1/27, Vaidya) reports HHS will implement rules prohibiting information blocking in April, but a new study conducted by researchers at the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology "has found that the practice is prevalent among EHR vendors and providers." Data indicate "more EHR vendors engage in information blocking than health systems."

Columnist: Becerra Is "The Right Man" To Lead HHS.

In an opinion piece for the Los Angeles Times (1/28, 3.37M), columnist George Skelton profiles HHS Secretary Nominee Xavier Becerra, who "scoffs at critics who claim he's unqualified to be U.S. Health secretary – and help vaccinate America – because he's not a medical professional. He's merely a politician." Skelton says Becerra is correct. HHS "is loaded with doctors and medical experts. What's most needed to head the sprawling agency with 80,000 employees is a strong leader who can organize and achieve." Skelton says that "based on Becerra's history, President Biden chose the right man." Skelton adds that within HHS, "there are lots of cylinders," including the surgeon general, Medicare and Medicaid, CDC, FDA, and the NIH.

National Front Page News

Headlines From Today's Front Pages.

Wall Street Journal:

GameStop Mania Reveals Power Shift On Wall Street – And The Pros Are Reeling
GameStop Is A Bubble In Its Purest Form
Boeing Reports Record Annual Loss
Apple's iPhone 12 Helped Deliver A Record $111.4 Billion Quarter
Jack Ma's Ant Plans Major Revamp In Response To Chinese Pressure
Apple Pay Offers Germ-Free Shopping – If Only We Could Figure Out How It Works

New York Times:

Biden Team Rushes To Take Over Government, And Oust Trump Loyalists

Extremists Emboldened By Capitol Attack Pose Rising Threat, Homeland Security Says
'Dumb Money' Is On GameStop, And It's Beating Wall Street At Its Own Game
Biden, Emphasizing Job Creation, Signs Sweeping Climate Actions
Queens Prosecutors Long Overlooked Misconduct. Can A New DA Do Better?
The Reality Behind Biden's Plan To Legalize 11 Million Immigrants

Washington Post:
Unlikely Shares Surge In Wall Street Revolt
Biden Set For Clash On Climate
GOP Looks Beyond Capitol Riot To 2022
1 Week In, Biden Embracing Order, Routine
The Holocaust As An Underlying Condition

Financial Times:
Hedge Fund Melvin Closes Bet Against GameStop After Reddit Trader Onslaught
EU Demands UK Covid Vaccines From AstraZeneca To Make Up Shortfall
More Than 100,000 British Pigs Stranded By Brexit Border Problems
Hong Kong Grills Finance Executives On Reasons For Leaving

Washington Times:
Race Dominates Early Days Of Biden Presidency: 'It's Like The Great Society For Identity Politics'
Defiant Hawley Counters Bipartisan Backlash: 'We Will Not Bow Down To The Mob'
Air Force Warns Of Decaying Nuclear Triad In Push For New Cruise Missile
March For Life Adjusts To Political U-Turn On Abortion At White House
Biden Accused Of 'War On Energy' With Ambitious Orders To Combat Climate Change
Democrats Introduce Legislation To Make DC The 51st State

Story Lineup From Last Night's Network News:
ABC: COVID-Schools; Vaccine Distribution; Domestic Terrorism; Severe Weather; Weather Report; Biden-Climate Change; Impeachment; Texas-Standoff; Wall Street; NFL-Seahawks Player Accused of Assault; Apple-OS Alert; Walgreens CEO; Super Bowl-Amanda Gorman; Cloris Leachman.
CBS: Vaccine Distribution; COVID-Schools; Domestic Terrorism; Severe Weather; Biden-Climate Change; Wall Street-GameStop; Cloris Leachman; FDA-Hand Sanitizers; National Zoo; Georgia-Police Chief Seeks To Unify Community.
NBC: Vaccine Distribution; COVID-Variants; COVID-Children; Domestic Terrorism; Biden-Climate Change; Alexei Navalny; Severe Weather; Trust In Vaccines; NFL-Seahawks Player Accused of Assault; Wall Street-GameStop; Cloris Leachman; Holocaust Survivor.

Network TV At A Glance:
Vaccine Distribution – 7 minutes, 5 seconds

Domestic Terrorism – 5 minutes, 55 seconds
Biden-Climate Change – 5 minutes, 40 seconds

Last Laughs

Late Night Political Humor.

Sam Bee: "Despite having the coolest, fastest-sounding name a 12-year-old boy could think of, Trump's Operation Warp Speed has been frustratingly slow. ... All over the country, shortages are now forcing states to cancel immunization appointments, even though vaccine makers are manufacturing doses at full capacity. And with unpredictable shipments and information from the federal government, states have been unable to plan their own distribution, leaving thousands of vaccines to wind up in the garbage. But, on the plus side, our nation's raccoons are now totally ready for the pandemic."

Sam Bee: "His first day in office, the President signed an order requiring masks in federal buildings and on federal lands. Then on his second day, he signed another order mandating masks in airports and in many trains, planes, and buses. And the third day, he said 'Let's get loud!' and took the rest of the day off."

Jimmy Kimmel: "This is interesting. You know who the highest-paid employee of the US government is? Dr. Fauci is number one, for real. Dr. Fauci makes more than the President. ... And of course, some people are angry. They're criticizing, which is crazy. First of all, he's a doctor. That's what doctors make. You want a discount doctor in there? And secondly, he's trying to stop a pandemic. He's not out playing golf with his beeper off."

Jimmy Kimmel: "It's being reported that Mike Pence, after leaving Washington, has no place to live. He and his wife have supposedly been crashing with friends back home in Indiana. Which has got to be awkward. 'Listen, Mr. Vice President, we deeply respect and appreciate your service, but would you mind folding up the couch?'"

Jimmy Kimmel: "One theory is that the Pences are moving around because they've been getting death threats from supporters of his crazy former boss. Thanks again, Don! I wonder what Mike Pence will do next? He's probably not going to be President. Does he go back to radio? 'Mike and Mother in the Morning'? Maybe open a bakery that only makes heterosexual wedding cakes?"

Stephen Colbert: "Yesterday, President Biden announced a dramatic change to America's COVID plan: There is one."

Stephen Colbert: "Biden also promised states that the total amount of vaccine they're getting will rise from 8.6 million to at least 10 million a week starting next week. That means February 2, next week, Groundhog's Day, Punxsutawney Phil will come out of his burrow and get vaccinated! Now he can be within six feet of his shadow."

Stephen Colbert: "One former administration official is really having a tough time, because we just learned that Mike Pence is homeless. ... The problem is since Pence had free government lodging for the last four years, the ex-veep doesn't own a house. So when the Pences moved out of the Vice President's residence, they had

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nowhere to go. That's how all-in Mike Pence was with his delusional boss. He was so devoted to the lie that they had beaten Biden that he made no plans whatsoever on where to live. That's like the 'Titanic' getting rid of its lifeboats to have more hull space to paint the word 'unsinkable!'"

Stephen Colbert: "But [the Pences] are not out on the street. [They] are reportedly couch-surfing their way through Indiana, which is also the title of the worst Beach Boys album ever."

Stephen Colbert: "Pence isn't the only presidential lackey having a bit of a tough time. So is MyPillow founder Mike Lindell. ... Lindell has spent the past few months peddling debunked conspiracy theories about voter fraud, urging the last administration to impose martial law to remain in office, and having the MyPillow site offer discount codes like 'QAnon.' I guess Lindell thought betraying your country would pay off. Reminds me of when Benedict Arnold sold us out to the British to get 15% off a set of Shake Weights."

Jimmy Fallon: "We are now officially one week into Joe Biden's presidency, and for the first time in a while, a week actually felt like a week. ... Time sure does fly when you're not doom-scrolling through Twitter till 4:00 a.m. Right now, liquor stores are like, 'Where the hell did everybody go?'"

Jimmy Fallon: "In one week, we've gone from insurrection to cool and collected. Anarchy to no malarkey. Drinking bleach to boring speech."

Jimmy Fallon: "Eve, n though Biden has only been on the job for seven full days, his initial approval rating is higher than Trump's ever was. Yeah I'm pretty sure by the end, Trump's approval rating was hovering around the temperature that you have to store the Pfizer vaccine. ... Trump was like, 'Yeah, but if you ask militia members on the no-fly list, my numbers are through the roof.'"

Seth Meyers: "President Biden had his first call yesterday with Russian President Vladimir Putin. He didn't mean to; he was just talking to one of the plants in the Oval Office and it talked back."

Seth Meyers: "The Senate voted yesterday to move forward with former President Trump's impeachment trial, with 45 Republicans indicating that they would not vote to convict Trump. I guess once you reach that age, it's pretty hard to remember stuff that happened three weeks ago."

Seth Meyers: "Republican Senator Ted Cruz has reintroduced a bill to impose term limits on members of Congress for a third time. Said Cruz, 'Please pass this bill for the sake of my co-workers.'"

James Corden: "President Biden continues to go on an unprecedented tear, signing executive action after executive action. ... In one week, he's signed a record 37 executive actions. He's 78 years old. At his age, signing 37 executive orders, that counts as cardio."

National News

Biden Takes Executive Action Against "Existential Threat" Of Climate Change.

Coverage of President Biden's Wednesday executive actions on climate change highlight the President's efforts to link climate-friendly policies with job creation. David Muir said on ABC World News Tonight (1/27, story 6, 2:10, 7.45M) that the President issued "several executive actions on climate [Wednesday], saying it is time to act, and saying it's an opportunity to create American jobs – one million jobs, he says, in the auto industry alone." ABC's Cecilia Vega: "Calling the climate crisis an 'existential threat,'" Biden signed "sweeping executive actions reaching across the federal government." Biden: "We've already waited too long to deal with this climate crisis. We can't wait any longer. We see it with our own eyes. We feel it. We know it in our bones, and it's time to act." Vega: "The actions mandate for the first time that climate change be a central part of all national security and foreign policy decisions. They also freeze new oil and natural gas leases on federal land and waters, invest in low-income and minority communities disproportionately impacted by pollution, and order the government to purchase zero emission vehicles for its massive fleet."

Norah O'Donnell said on the CBS Evening News (1/27, story 5, 2:00, 6.92M), "With scientists warning of more extreme weather due to climate change," the President "took action to confront what he calls an 'existential threat.'" CBS' Nancy Cordes: "The executive order he signed today establishes a White House Office of Domestic Climate Policy, directs federal agencies to procure zero-emission vehicles, and calls for a pause on all new oil and gas leases on public lands and in off-shore waters. ... His predecessor often questioned the existence of climate change, and rolled back nearly 100 environmental rules and regulations related to air pollution, protected species, drilling, and water." President Donald Trump: "I withdrew the United States from the unfair and one-sided Paris climate accord." Cordes: "The man responsible for rejoining those accords is the new special climate envoy, John Kerry. ... The former secretary of state wants to strike new initiative deals with some of the world's biggest polluters, including China."

Anne Thompson said on NBC Nightly News (1/27, story 5, 1:30, Holt, 6M), "After the hottest decade on record, the Biden Administration [is] taking action on climate change, selling it as an economic recovery program." Biden: "When I think of climate change and the answers to it, I think of jobs." Thompson: "Today's executive order include making climate change a national security priority, conserving 30% of all federal land and water by 2030, and having the federal government buy zero-emission vehicles. ... The most controversial order: pausing new oil and gas leases on federal lands and waters."

White House National Climate Adviser Gina McCarthy said on PBS' NewsHour (1/27, 743K), "If we expect to regrow the economy after we tackle COVID-19, we need to grow jobs. We need people to have food on their table, food that's healthy. We need our country to be more secure and grow. The path forward to get that done is clean energy. In fact, clean energy jobs were the fastest growing sector before the pandemic hit." McCarthy continued, "We can grow thousands of good-paying union jobs. This is our opportunity to invest in environmental justice communities that have been left behind."

White House Council of Economic Advisers member Heather Boushey said on MSNBC (1/27, 2.35M), "This is about the future of the American economy, and it's about American competitiveness. These executive orders...are about making sure that the Administration is doing its part to propel our economy forward and to make sure that climate investments and thinking about how we transition to a carbon-free economy is a part of the plan. We need to make sure that we are the competitive leader in innovating and investing in these kinds of new parts of industry, and this is a first step and a really important step in taking us there."

The AP (1/27, Daly, Knickmeyer) calls Wednesday's actions "the most ambitious U.S. effort to stave off the worst of climate change. ... Biden's sweeping plan is aimed at staving off the worst of global warming caused by

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burning fossil fuels. But his effort it also carries political risk for the president and Democrats as oil- and coal-producing states face job losses from moves to sharply increase U.S. reliance on clean energy such as wind and solar power." Reuters (1/27, Volcovici, Mason) reports that Biden "said building a modern and resilient climate-related infrastructure and a clean energy future for the United States would create millions of good-paying union jobs." Biden's focus on climate change "has cheered international partners and environmental advocates, but upset Big Oil." Bloomberg (1/27, 3.57M) reports, "Biden's temporary halt to drilling on federal lands leaves the vast majority of U.S. crude production untouched, though it may be the death knell for the Gulf of Mexico's already dwindling output."

The New York Times (1/27, Friedman, Flavelle, 20.6M) reports that Biden, "looking to counteract Republican claims that his climate policies would hurt an economy already weakened by the pandemic...cast many of his orders as job creators, among other things pledging to use the purchasing power of the federal government to buy a vast fleet of zero-emissions vehicles." The Times adds that the executive orders "also set broad new foreign policy goals, including specifying that climate change, for the first time, will be a core part of all foreign policy and national security decisions."

USA Today (1/27, Subramanian, King, 12.7M) reports Biden "pledged to be the most aggressive president on climate change. ... His goal is to decarbonize the U.S. power sector by 2035 on the way to reaching net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The USA emits the second-largest amount of carbon dioxide (CO2), producing about 5.41 billion metric tons in 2018. China emits nearly twice that amount." The Washington Post (1/27, Eilperin, Dennis, 10.52M) similarly says Biden "had long promised to become the climate president. ... But as he detailed his plans, the gas, oil and coal industries were already mobilizing on all fronts." The Wall Street Journal (1/27, Puko, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports outgoing Senate Environment and Public Works Chairman John Barrasso said, "Energy producers will simply go elsewhere – likely out of state or overseas. The President's order will deprive thousands of people in Wyoming of their jobs and a principal source of revenue for public education and other essential services."

The Los Angeles Times (1/27, 3.37M) reports that "despite opposition from the fossil fuel industry and many Republicans," Biden "emphasized that that a comprehensive climate effort would create clean-energy jobs nationwide." The New York Daily News (1/27, Sommerfeldt, 2.51M) says "the pause on drilling does not impact private lands, which are mostly regulated by states, and Biden's executive order also exempts tribal lands from the pause." The San Francisco Chronicle (1/27, 2.44M) reports, "Oil and gas extraction on federal lands is responsible for nearly a quarter of the nation's emissions of carbon dioxide, the dominant planet-warming gas, according to the U.S. Geological Survey."

The Houston Chronicle (1/27, Osborne, 982K) says that "in the short term," Wednesday's actions "are likely to only shift energy use around the margins. But in the long run, they signal a larger shift that threatens to disrupt businesses and lives in places such as Houston – the so-called 'energy capital of the world.'" The Dallas Morning News (1/27, 772K) reports Reps. Henry Cuellar (D-TX), Vicente Gonzalez (D-TX), Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX), and Marc Veasey (D-TX) urged Biden "to rescind his moratorium...marking an early intraparty schism as the new president lays out his policy agenda."

The Denver Post (1/27, 660K) reports, "Biden's order issued Wednesday to pause new oil and gas leasing on public lands was praised by Coloradans who see the move as crucial to fighting climate change. ... But the Denver-based Western Energy Alliance, an industry organization, said a recent study by a Wyoming trade group

shows a prolonged leasing moratorium could cost eight Western states as much as $33.5 billion over Biden's first term and 58,676 jobs annually."

Politico (1/27, Colman, Lefebvre, 6.73M) says Biden is "launching his sweeping assault on climate change with a much larger army of allies than Barack Obama had 12 years ago – a coalition that ranges from labor unions, anti-fracking activists and racial justice advocates to leaders of Wall Street, the auto industry and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce." However, Politico adds that Biden "also faces a challenge: holding together this teeming coalition, with its many competing agendas, long enough to break the logjam in Congress that doomed Obama's efforts to force his policy changes through Congress."

In an editorial, the New York Times (1/27, 20.6M) says Biden "is moving aggressively to turn the page on the Trump era" with a rush of executive orders – which the Times says is "no way to make law. A polarized, narrowly divided Congress may offer Mr. Biden little choice but to employ executive actions or see his entire agenda held hostage. These directives, however, are a flawed substitute for legislation." Executive actions are also "far more ephemeral and easily discarded than legislation, which can set up a whipsaw effect, as each president scrambles to undo the work of his predecessor." The Washington Post (1/27, Viser, 10.52M) also highlights Biden's "burst of activity" in his first week in office, "an almost jarring departure from his predecessor's chaotic style."

In an editorial, the Los Angeles Times (1/27, 3.37M) argues that when it comes to the environment, "the advent of the Biden administration, while not some sudden flick of a switch to a better future, is nevertheless welcome." However, the Wall Street Journal (1/27, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says in an editorial that the and gas lease moratorium will hurt both workers and state government revenues, which will cost the states needed funding for education and other essentials. The Hill (1/27, Beitsch, 5.69M), and the CNN (1/27, LeBlanc, 89.21M) and Fox News (1/27, Schultz, 23.99M) websites, also have reports.

Biden: "We're Not Going To Ban Fracking." The Washington Post (1/27, Wagner, Sonmez, 10.52M) reports Biden "emphasized during his remarks on climate change...that he has no plans to ban fracking – an issue that dogged him during the campaign because of a verbal slip and repeated misrepresentations of his plans by Trump." Biden said, "Let me be clear, and I know it always comes up, we're not going to ban fracking." However, Roll Call (1/27, Morton, 130K) reports that "some progressive groups want him to go further and faster. Food & Water Watch Policy Director Mitch Jones, for example, called for the White House to end all drilling and fracking."

Ocasio-Cortez Highlights Plan's Similarities With Green New Deal. The New York Post (1/27, Jacobs, 7.45M) reports Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) "took credit Wednesday for President Biden's newly unveiled $2 trillion set of environmental policies, which include eliminating coal, oil and natural gas as electricity sources by 2035." Ocasio-Cortez tweeted, "It's almost as if we helped shape the platform." The tweet, which was "followed by a winking face emoji," was in response to NBC's Geoff Bennett, "who noted the similarities between the Biden's executive orders" and Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal proposal.

The Wall Street Journal (1/27, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says in an editorial that Senate Majority Leader Schumer has pressed Biden to move left on the environment and other issues out of fear that Ocasio-Cortez may challenge him in the 2022 New York Senate primary.

NYTimes Analysis: At DOE, Granholm's Impact On Climate May Limited. The New York Times (1/27, Plumer, 20.6M) reports Energy Secretary-designate Granholm "is widely expected to play a central role in the administration's efforts to confront climate change. But that raises a question: How much can an energy

secretary realistically do to help reduce America's planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions?" While DOE "controls some powerful levers that could help advance clean-energy technologies," only about one-fifth DOE's budget is actually "devoted to energy programs. The rest goes toward maintaining the nation's nuclear weapons arsenal, cleaning up environmental messes from the Cold War and conducting scientific research in areas like high-energy physics."

Experts Say Orders Are Just Beginning Of Foreign Policy Shift. According to the New York Times (1/27, Sengupta, 20.6M), that the Biden Administration "has rejoined the Paris Agreement, the global pact embraced by nearly 200 countries to slow down climate change, is only the first step, foreign policy experts say. Taking on climate change will require a reassessment of everything from United States military posture in the Arctic to helping fragile countries deal with the fallout of climate risks." The Times adds, "The White House executive order offered a glimpse of that shift. It directed the nation's intelligence agencies to assess the risks posed by global warming around the world, and it directs all government agencies to figure out how 'climate considerations' fit into their international priorities."

Whitehouse Ends Weekly Climate Change Speeches After Nearly Nine Years. The Washington Post (1/27, 10.52M) reports Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) on Wednesday "ended his weekly 'Time to Wake Up' speeches on climate change after eight years, saying conditions are 'at last in a place for a real solution.' He made the speech 279 times." The Providence (RI) Journal (1/27, 376K) reports Whitehouse "delivered the first speech on April 18, 2012, three years after the House had passed a climate bill that the Senate refused to take up for consideration and after subsequent efforts to take action went nowhere. ... He has returned to the floor most weeks that the Senate has been in session since then, accompanied by an increasingly battered green posterboard showing an image of the Earth next to the words 'TIME TO WAKE UP.'" Roll Call (1/27, Cioffi, 130K) reports Whitehouse said Wednesday, "The conditions are at last in place for a real solution. A new dawn is breaking, and there's no need for my little candle against the darkness."

Monmouth Poll: Biden Approval 54%, Disapproval 30%, With Wide Partisan Divide.

A Monmouth University poll of 809 adults (1/21-1/24) has President Biden's approval rating at 54%, with 30% disapproving. Monmouth says in a news release that "opinion of the incumbent is sharply divided along partisan lines – 90% of Democrats, 47% of independents, and just 15% of Republicans approve of Biden."

Administration Creating Commission To Study SCOTUS, Judiciary Reforms.

Fox News (1/27, Schultz, 23.99M) reports on its website that the White House said Wednesday that President Biden is "'committed' to following through on his campaign pledge of forming a bipartisan commission to study Supreme Court reforms." In October, Biden "said...he'd put together a bipartisan commission of scholars to send him recommendations within 180 days on how to reform a court system that's 'getting out of whack.'" Fox quotes "a White House official" who said, "The President remains committed to an expert study of the role and debate over reform of the court and will have more to say in the coming weeks."

Likewise, Politico (1/27, Pager, 6.73M) says the Administration is "moving forward with the creation of a bipartisan commission to study reforms to the Supreme Court and the federal judiciary." The commission will fall "under the purview of the White House Counsel's office and filled out with the behind-the-scenes help of the Biden campaign's lawyer Bob Bauer, who will co-chair the commission." While the commission's "specific

mandate is still being decided," in what Politico calls "a signal that the commission is indeed moving ahead, some members have already been selected, according to multiple people familiar with the discussions."

CFPB Expected To Exercise Its Powers Under Biden.

The Washington Post (1/27, Newmyer, 10.52M) says the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, "the watchdog created after the 2008 financial meltdown and largely muzzled in the Trump era, is poised to start barking again." According to the Post, the CFPB "will focus first on enforcing legal protections for distressed renters, student borrowers and others facing growing debt that its previous leadership has been lax about imposing during the pandemic." However, the Post adds that the CFPB, "which President Biden has tapped 38-year-old Rohit Chopra to lead...is also likely to take an unprecedentedly tough line against industry giants it finds engaging in abusive practices, former agency officials advising the Biden team say."

FCC's Rosenworcel Pushing To Reinstate Net Neutrality Rules.

The Washington Post (1/27, Romm, 10.52M) says, "More than three years ago, Jessica Rosenworcel could only react in horror as her Republican counterparts on the Federal Communications Commission voted to repeal the U.S. government's net neutrality rules," but "now, Rosenworcel controls the very commission she once criticized for failing to heed the public's outcry. And her stewardship – along with Democrats' broader resurgence in Washington – has brought new, sky-high expectations that the party deliver on its past promises, restore open-Internet protections and resolve one of the most intractable policy battles in the digital age." However, according to the Post, "reinstating those protections may prove difficult for Rosenworcel and her Democratic peers, at least at first. The FCC, with two Democrats and two Republicans, is politically deadlocked, lacking a fifth member."

Census Bureau Will Deliver US House Data In April.

The AP (1/27) reports that while the US Census Bureau "is aiming to deliver the long-delayed numbers used for divvying up congressional seats by the end of April," a "holdup on redistricting data could disrupt several states' abilities to redraw their own legislative maps ahead of upcoming elections." The AP says the new target "for finishing data processing for the apportionment numbers used for congressional seats is now April 30," but "a separate set of data used for redrawing districts for states and local governments won't be ready until after July in the most likely scenario, Kathleen Styles, a top bureau official, said during a presentation for the National Conference of State Legislatures." The Washington Post (1/27, Mayes, 10.52M) provides similar coverage.

Los Angeles Officials Hope Biden Order Will Help Shelter Thousands Of Homeless People.

The Los Angeles Times (1/27, Oreskes, 3.37M) reports Los Angeles officials are hopeful President Biden's executive order changing the way FEMA reimburses municipalities "will breathe new life into an effort to rent hotel rooms for homeless people who are vulnerable to the virus and struggle to isolate." Los Angeles "paid for each room and then expected to receive 75% of that money back" under former President Trump. Biden's signed an order last week "saying that FEMA should reimburse municipalities 100% of what they spend to house people in non-congregate shelters until the end of September." Councilman Mike Bonin has "introduced a motion asking the city to explore options for renting more hotel rooms. He thinks the city should be thinking of renting thousands or tens of thousands of rooms."

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WPost Examines District Of Columbia Statehood Push.

In a 4,800-word piece for the Washington Post (1/27, 10.52M), freelance writer Nora Caplan-Bricker examines the campaign for District of Columbia statehood, which is in its strongest position in years after the first-ever House passage of statehood legislation in 2020 and Democratic control of both houses of Congress and the White House. Caplan-Bricker writes, "For the first time in American history, D.C. statehood is now both a political priority in the halls of Congress and a popular demand far beyond the District's borders. And that's in part due to the work of activist groups such as 51 for 51, whose members spent the better part of a year before the pandemic traveling to places like South Carolina, New Hampshire and Iowa, speaking with voters who had no idea that roughly 700,000 Americans – more than the populations of Wyoming or Vermont – pay federal taxes without possessing a vote in Congress."

NYTimes Analysis: Progressives Believe Biden Will Ultimately Back Eliminating Filibuster.

A New York Times (1/27, Herndon, Lerer, 20.6M) analysis reports that President Biden's "most significant move" so far may be "a reaffirmation of an old stance – that the Senate should protect the filibuster." The Times adds that some believe Biden "and Senate holdouts, will warm to the idea once Republicans block a popular piece of legislation," while others "think that Mr. Biden's desire to be seen as a transformational president will overwhelm his instincts as a bedrock Washington traditionalist." The Times says "progressive activist groups and liberal lawmakers have largely responded to Mr. Biden's position with more of a shrug than a rallying cry. In interviews, several leaders said it was too soon to push for eliminating the filibuster," and they "maintained that Mr. Biden would change his thinking once his promise to 'Build Back Better' faced the full reality of congressional partisanship."

Leahy Health Scare Highlights "Fragile" Democratic Senate Control.

The Boston Globe (1/27, 1.04M) reports under the headline "Leahy's Health Scare Is A Reminder Of Just How Fragile Democratic Control Is In D.C." that the health scare Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT) had Tuesday highlighted the fact that "should the 80-year-old and the longest-serving Senate Democrat vacate his seat for whatever reason," Vermont Gov. Phil Scott (R) would name a replacement. Politico (1/27, Everett, 6.73M) says in a similar report titled "Leahy's Hospitalization Shows Dems' Majority Hangs By Thread" that "just the possibility of Leahy missing a day of work sent a jolt through an evenly divided Senate."

Video Shows Greene "Harassing" Parkland Survivor Hogg.

The South Florida Sun Sentinel (1/27, Man, 525K) reports video surfaced Wednesday showing Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) following gun control activist near the US Capitol, "harassing him and trying to goad him into responding." Hogg became an activist after 2018 "massacre that killed 17 people and wounded 17 others at his school, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland." In the video, "Greene trails Hogg, making comments and asking him questions as he walks down a sidewalk, demanding to know how he managed to see elected officials."

The Washington Post (1/27, Thebault, 10.52M) reports, "Several prominent Democrats and activist groups are arguing Greene should resign or be removed from elected office, and a small number of GOP lawmakers have also criticized her" after social media posts by Greene threatening Democratic elected officials surfaced

earlier this week. USA Today (1/27, Hayes, 12.7M) reports, "In a Facebook post from April 2018, Greene responded to a post from a person who asked if former President Barack Obama and former Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton could be hung, CNN reported. Greene replied by saying the 'stage is being set. Players are being put in place. We must be patient. This must be done perfectly or liberal judges would let them off,' CNN reported."

The Rome (GA) News-Tribune (1/27, Wagner, 54K) reports, "Advocacy groups Everytown for Gun Safety, Moms Demand Action and Students Demand Action renewed their calls for Greene's resignation Tuesday," before the Hogg video surfaced. Politico (1/27, Fineout, 6.73M) and The Hill (1/27, Marcos, 5.69M) also have reports.

Sinclair Broadcast Group Ending Bolling Show.

The AP (1/27, Bauder) reports, "The Sinclair Broadcast Group says it is ending its 'America This Week' show with Eric Bolling, which has been criticized for misstatements about the coronavirus pandemic. Sinclair said the show, which has been sent to stations that the company owns in 81 markets across the country, will shut down after this week's episode 'as Eric has decided to pursue other professional opportunities.'"

Kaine Floats Trump Censure As Votes Appear Short For Senate Conviction.

The AP (1/27, Jalonick, Mascaro) reports Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA) "said Wednesday that he's discussing with colleagues whether a censure resolution to condemn former President Donald Trump for his role in the deadly Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol could be an alternative to impeachment, even as the Senate proceeds with a trial." Cecilia Vega said on ABC World News Tonight (1/27, story 7, 0:50, Muir, 7.45M) that Kaine and Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) are "coming together to craft a joint resolution that would censure [Trump]. This, of course, is coming as Democrats appear to be falling far short of those 17 Republican votes that they need" for conviction. On CNN (1/27, 2.78M), Poppy Harlow said "the question" for Democrats is, "Can they convince enough Senate Republicans to actually convict? All signs right now [are] pointing to no."

USA Today (1/27, Jansen, 12.7M) reports Kaine said he began drafting a censure measure "after the Senate voted 55 to 45 Tuesday to reject a motion" that "challenged the impeachment trial as unconstitutional because Trump has already left office. ... Kaine called the vote 'clarifying' that there won't be 67 votes to convict Trump." The Wall Street Journal (1/27, Hughes, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports Collins and Kaine hope a censure resolution would pass with broad bipartisan support.

But the Washington Post (1/27, DeBonis, Kane, 10.52M) reports Senate Majority Leader Schumer said the trial will proceed. Schumer said, "Make no mistake, there will be a trial, and the evidence against the former president will be presented in living color for the nation and every one of us to see once again. We will all watch what happened. We will listen to what happened, and then we will vote. We will pass judgment as our solemn duty under the Constitution demands. And in turn, we will all be judged on how we respond." NBC News (1/27, 4.91M) reports on its website that Trump "is not planning to appear in person to defend himself against the charge that he incited the deadly riot" at the US Capitol, according to "people familiar with the matter," but may submit a written statement.

The Washington Post (1/27, Scherer, Dawsey, 10.52M) reports Senate Minority Leader McConnell and House Minority Leader McCarthy have both "signaled that they are ready to look past questions of responsibility for the violent effort to overturn the result of the presidential election, an attempt that left a Capitol Police officer

and four rioters dead, as they maneuver to avoid a divisive battle within the Republican Party and try to position it to reclaim power in 2022." The New York Times (1/27, Fandos, 20.6M) says McConnell's "decision on Tuesday to join all but five Republican senators in voting to toss out the House's impeachment case against Mr. Trump as unconstitutional seemed to be less a reversal than a recognition that the critical mass of his party was not ready to join him in cutting loose the former president."

In an op-ed in the New York Times (1/27, 20.6M), former CIA Counterterrorism Center Director Robert Grenier writes, "We may be witnessing the dawn of a sustained wave of violent insurgency within our own country, perpetrated by our own countrymen." Grenier argues that "convicting [Trump] in the Senate and barring him from future elective office is not only a just punishment for his crimes but also a national security imperative." Axios (1/27, Chen, 1.26M), Politico (1/27, Levine, 6.73M), and The Hill (1/27, Carney, 5.69M) also have updates on the impeachment trial process.

McDaniel Says RNC Will Be "Neutral" In 2024 If Trump Runs Again.

The AP (1/27, Peoples) reports that on Wednesday, Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel "declined to encourage former President Donald Trump to run for the White House in 2024, saying the GOP would stay 'neutral' in its next presidential primary." McDaniel said, "The party has to stay neutral. I'm not telling anybody to run or not to run in 2024. That's going to be up to those candidates going forward. What I really do want to see him do, though, is help us win back majorities in 2022."

Politico Analysis: Retirements Hamper GOP Bid To Take Back Senate In 2022.

Politico (1/27, Arkin, Everett, 6.73M) reports that even though Republicans "need to flip just one seat next year to win back the Senate majority" in 2022, retirements "are already complicating their path back to power. Two of the three toughest GOP defensive states on the 2022 Senate map...are already open seats" due to the retirement plans of Sens. Richard Burr (R-NC) and Pat Toomey (R-PA). Politico says Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) is now "the most vulnerable Republican up for reelection, but Johnson hasn't even decided to run for a third term after previously pledging to serve just two." Sens. Roy Blunt (R-MO) and Charles Grassley (R-IA) have also not yet said if they will seek reelection.

Valadao Gets GOP Challenger In CA21 After Voting To Impeach Trump.

The Fresno (CA) Bee (1/27, 235K) reports Fresno City Councilman Chris Mathys will challenge Rep. David Valadao (R-CA) in the CA21 GOP primary in 2022. Valadao is "the only California Republican who voted to impeach President Donald Trump earlier this month." Mathys, "who came in last in the primary for a New Mexico House seat in the 2020 cycle, called Valadao's impeachment vote a sign of 'disloyalty' to Trump."

Lewandowski-Founded Group Raising Money For Cheney Challenger.

Axios (1/27, Markay, 1.26M) reports a "new political group founded by former Trump aide Corey Lewandowski is raising money to run a candidate" against Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY) following her vote to impeach President Donald Trump. Lewandowski's group "appears to be the first national GOP organization to target" Cheney.

Kennedy Creates PAC, But Says He Has "No Plans" To Seek Office.

The Boston Globe (1/27, 1.04M) reports ex-Rep. Joe Kennedy III (D-MA) is launching "a new political action committee aimed at bolstering grassroots organizing efforts in Massachusetts and overlooked states around the country." The Groundwork Project "will try to leverage the former congressman's substantial network of donors and allies to support community activists and 'hyperlocal' organizing efforts to help Democrats expand their base, win elections, and deliver on progressive policy priorities." However, asked if he is personally considering seeking office again, Kennedy "did not mince words: 'No plans whatsoever.'"

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NIH News

U.S. Records Its Deadliest Day Of The Pandemic While Eyes Are Fixed On Mob Storming Capitol.

The Washington Post (1/7, Firozi, Dupree, Kornfield, 10.52M) reports that "after angry rioters and supporters of President Trump stormed the U.S. Capitol in a last stand for the outgoing president, the United States has tallied its deadliest day of the coronavirus pandemic for the second straight day." On Thursday, over "4,000 people died of covid-19 in the United States, the first time the toll has exceeded that milestone, following a record day Wednesday of 3,915 deaths." The US' "death toll will continue to surge through January after Americans have gathered and traveled during the holidays, said" NIAID Director Anthony Fauci. Meanwhile, HHS "Secretary Alex Azar tweeted that the agency was 'committed to a peaceful and orderly transition of power over the next 13 days.'" NIH Director Francis Collins is quoted by the Post.

Additional Sources. The New York Times (1/7, Nagourney, Robertson, Smith, 20.6M) reports that on Wednesday, "the daily death toll in New Hampshire, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania also set records." Some states "reported single-day case records, while Illinois became one of five states that have now recorded their millionth case since the pandemic began." The Times adds that US Surgeon General Jerome Adams "said states need not adhere too rigidly to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines about whom to vaccinate first."

Bloomberg (1/7, Levin, 3.57M) reports COVID-19 "deaths in the U.S. are likely to maintain a near-record pace at least through the month as mounting hospitalizations offset any positive effect from the halting start to inoculations." The country "will end January averaging about 2,600 deaths a day, according to the latest forecast updated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Wednesday, a figure based on projections from 36 different models."

The AP (1/7, Johnson, Pane) reports "the virus is surging in several states, with California hit particularly hard, reporting on Thursday a record two-day total of 1,042 coronavirus deaths." Rising "caseloads there are threatening to force hospitals to ration care and essentially decide who lives and who dies."

CNN (1/7, Holcombe, Andone, 89.21M) reports Thursday marked "the third day in a row of record daily deaths from the disease, according to data from Johns Hopkins University, while the number of people who have been infected topped more than 21.56 million." The CDC's "most recent forecast projected there will be between 405,000 and 438,000 deaths by the end of the month."

CNBC (1/7, Feuer, 7.34M) reports "top officials at the CDC, including Dr. Nancy Messonnier, director of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, have said they expect the [vaccine] rollout to pick up speed this month."

Vox (1/7, Scott, 1.88M) reports CDC "Director Robert Redfield warned at the beginning of December that the US could see as many as 450,000 Covid-19 deaths by February. Yet there's been no significant federal mobilization to combat the surge."

The Intelligencer (1/7, Stieb, 1.3M) reports "a new, more virulent COVID strain – which is not resistant to the vaccine – has spread rapidly throughout the United Kingdom and has been detected in at least eight states." Former FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb "predicted last week that the more contagious strain could account for the 'majority' of new cases in the U.S. by March."

Among other news outlets reporting on the story are ABC World News Tonight (1/7, story 6, 0:30, Muir, 7.47M), the CBS Evening News (1/7, story 9, 1:40, O'Donnell, 4.61M), The Hill (1/7, Sullivan, 5.69M), US News & World Report (1/7, Smith-Schoenwalder, 1.91M), the Atlanta Journal-Constitution (1/7, Darnell, 1.46M), and the Financial Times (1/7, Wells, Subscription Publication, 1.48M).

COVID-19 Hospitalizations Continue To Increase In US. The Atlantic (1/7, 3.53M) says in an analysis that "in the first week of 2021, the United States reported more cases of COVID-19 than at any other point in the pandemic so far, and the second-highest number of deaths." Data-reporting slowdowns during the holiday season "are likely still affecting most metrics – most notably reported tests, which are still well below pre-holiday levels." Meanwhile, "hospitalizations, our most stable metric through the holidays, continue to march upward."

More Infectious COVID Variant Likely Widespread In The U.S., Experts Say.

HealthDay (1/7, Foster, Mundell, 11K) reports the more contagious coronavirus variant discovered in the UK "is showing signs that it is spreading widely throughout the United States, health officials and experts said this week." NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins told the Washington Post Wednesday that he would be surprised if the number of cases reported in the US "doesn't grow pretty rapidly." Greg Armstrong, the leader of the CDC's strain surveillance program, agreed, saying, "Here at the CDC, we're definitely taking this seriously, and we're assuming for now that this variant is more transmissible."

Gene Therapy Beats Premature-Aging Syndrome In Mice.

Science (1/8, Kaiser, 484K) reports findings from a mouse study published in Nature "have inspired hope for treating children born with progeria, a rare, fatal, genetic disease that causes symptoms much like early aging." The article adds, "In mice with a progeria-causing mutation, a cousin of the celebrated genome editor known as CRISPR corrected the DNA mistake, preventing the heart damage typical of the disease." Harvard University's David Liu led a group that "teamed up with Vanderbilt University cardiologist Jonathan Brown and Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, whose group was one of two that identified the progeria mutation in 2003."

Fauci Strikes Hopeful Tone In Speech To Missouri University.

The AP (1/7, Salter) reports, "The coronavirus pandemic will get worse before it gets better, but vaccinations 'will be the real gateway' to a return to normal, Dr. Anthony Fauci told a group of Missouri scientists and students Thursday." Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, "spoke remotely during the Washington University School of Medicine's 'Grand Rounds' forum." The live lecture "allows experts to discuss clinical problems and new research."

Additional Source. Fauci told Axios (1/7, Drage O'Reilly, 1.26M) that while the impact of coronavirus mutations on the first round of vaccines' efficacy "could be an issue," it is unlikely to hurt the vaccination efforts due to the "plug-and-play" aspect of mRNA vaccine technology. "Because there's now a large amount of data about the mRNA-based vaccine platform, 'it is likely the FDA would consider it merely a strain change, which doesn't require starting from square one,' he says."

Fauci Says U.S. Needs More Time To 'Catch Up' On Vaccine Rollout.

NPR (1/7, King, 3.69M) publishes the highlights of an interview on NPR's Morning Edition with NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci who "said Thursday that the vaccines' initial rollout has been slow because it came during the holiday period." Dr. Fauci said, "I think it would be fair to just observe what happens in the next couple of weeks. If we don't catch up on what the original goal was, then we really need to make some changes about what we're doing." He "also said that a more contagious variant of the virus first identified in the United Kingdom and now spreading in the U.S. underscores the need to follow public health measures like mask wearing and social distancing." In addition, Fauci "said that while the U.K. has implemented a lockdown, he doesn't see 'any enthusiasm' for similar nationwide measures in this country."

Additional Source. The New York Times (1/7, Zraick, Robbins, 20.6M) covers Fauci's NPR interview as well.

Fauci Says Vaccine Rollout's "Bumps And Hiccups" Won't Last Long.

Axios (1/7, Drage O'Reilly, 1.26M) reports, "Despite the slow roll out of vaccines so far, NIAID director Anthony Fauci says the COVID-19 vaccination campaign will ramp up fast enough that Americans should see 'a degree of normality in the fall.'" President-elect Biden" is planning a program that will have 'much more interaction between the federal government and the states than there are right now' in order to reach his goal of 1 million vaccines a day for 100 days, Fauci tells Axios." Millions of available vaccine doses "haven't been administered, raising questions about what went wrong with Operation Warp Speed."

Additional Source. The Daily Caller (1/7, Safi, 375K) also reports.

People Without Symptoms Spread Virus In More Than Half Of Cases, CDC Model Finds.

The Washington Post (1/7, Guarino, 10.52M) reports, "People with no symptoms transmit more than half of all cases of the novel coronavirus, according to a model developed by" CDC researchers. According to the model, 59% of transmissions come from asymptomatic people. The findings were published in JAMA Network Open.

Additional Sources. The New York Daily News (1/8, Braine, 2.51M) reports on the study and says NIAID Director Anthony Fauci previously "emphasized how easy it was to get the virus, even from someone without symptoms."

NBC Nightly News (1/7, story 11, 1:20, Holt, 5.91M) also reported on the story.

Pfizer/BioNTech Vaccine Appears Effective Against Mutation In New Coronavirus Variants – Study.

Reuters (1/7, Erman) reports, "Pfizer Inc and BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine appeared to work against a key mutation in the highly transmissible new variants of the coronavirus discovered in the UK and South Africa, according to a" not-yet peer reviewed study conducted by Pfizer with the University of Texas Medical Branch. The research "indicated the vaccine was effective in neutralizing virus with the so-called N501Y mutation of the spike protein," which "could be responsible for greater transmissibility." Experts were also concerned the new variant "could also make the virus escape antibody neutralization elicited by the vaccine, said Phil Dormitzer, one of Pfizer's top viral vaccine scientists."

Additional Sources. The Washington Post (1/8, Johnson, 10.52M) reports NIAID Vaccine Research Center Director John Mascola said there was a "major effort within NIH to work with the companies to do these exact tests...happening as we speak." Mascola added, "One clear scientific message is that we need to track and study these variants in great detail. ... A variant can emerge in a population and become dominant in a matter of weeks or months."

The AP (1/8, Neergaard) reports NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "recently said vaccines are designed to recognize multiple parts of the spike protein, making it unlikely a single mutation could be enough to block them," but researchers "around the world are conducting research with different vaccines to find out."

CBS News (1/8, 5.39M) reports that Fauci added, "You always have to take these things seriously, follow them closely, and hope there will not be a problem. But, if there is, you have to adjust to it. And now we have the technology to do that pretty easily."

ABC News (1/8, Salzman, 2.44M) also covers the story.

US Sees Five Deadliest Days Since Covid-19 Pandemic's Start In Last Two Weeks.

CNN (1/8, Maxouris, 89.21M) reports, "In just less than two weeks, the US recorded its five deadliest days since the Covid-19 pandemic's start – with more than 4,000 virus-related deaths reported Thursday." Furthermore, it will be months before vaccinations are "widespread enough to make a meaningful impact in the pandemic's course, experts have warned." NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci said the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines will need weeks to "catch up on what the original goal was" after delays in delivering on what health officials promised.

CDC Reports Over 50 Cases Of UK Coronavirus Strain In US.

Fox News (1/7, Rivas, 23.99M) reports "over 50 cases of the more contagious, mutated coronavirus strain first detected in the U.K. have been identified across the U.S., according to the" CDC. In a Wednesday update, "the CDC listed 26 cases in California, two in Colorado, 22 in Florida, one in Georgia and an additional case in New York, for a total of 52 cases." On Thursday, however, Pennsylvania's health department "said that it had a confirmed case of the variant as well." During a recent interview, NIAID Director Anthony Fauci "said it's clear the mutated U.K. strain will start cropping up in other states."

COVID Vaccine Hesitancy Is Highest In Rural America, Survey Shows.

US News & World Report (1/7, Cirruzzo, 1.91M) says, "More than a third of rural residents are hesitant to get a COVID-19 vaccine, survey results" from the Kaiser Family Foundation's COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor project show, "placing them alongside Republicans and Black adults as among the groups most wary of getting vaccinated." The survey shows "that 15% of rural residents said they would 'probably not get' a safe and free vaccine if available and 20% would 'definitely not get it.'" Meanwhile, 68% of rural Americans "said they trust the Food and Drug Administration, while 66% said they trust the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 64% trust their local health department, 59% trust government expert Dr. Anthony Fauci and 55% said they trust their state government."

The COVID-19 Virus Is Mutating. What Does That Mean For Vaccines?

TIME (1/7, Park, 18.1M) reports COVID-19 is celebrating the second year of "its invasion of the world's population with yet more mutated forms that help it to spread more easily from person to person." A coronavirus strain first discovered in the United Kingdom "has already raised alarms about whether the COVID-19 virus is now escaping from the protection that vaccines just being rolled out now might provide." NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "says that his teams are sequencing and studying the new variants to better understand what effect they might have on disease, how close they might be to causing more severe illness and, more importantly as more people get vaccinated, whether the new variants can escape the protection of the vaccines we know work today."

Virus Variant Found In Pa.; State Urges Elementary Schools To Bring Back Students.

The Philadelphia Inquirer (1/7, McDaniel, Hanna, McCarthy) reports "Pennsylvania education officials on Thursday encouraged school districts to bring elementary school students back to classrooms with hybrid learning models as soon as this month, a recommendation that drew immediate backlash from the state's largest teachers' union." Still, it is "up to school districts to decide when to bring students into classrooms." However, "the state's top health and education officials said the benefits of in-person education for certain students outweighed the risks of spreading the coronavirus – despite ongoing substantial community spread in every

county in the commonwealth." The Inquirer adds that NIAID Director Anthony Fauci "predicted that the [COVID-19] surge will worsen in January and that the national death toll, now above 364,000, will continue rapidly rising."

Are We At The Beginning Of The End Of COVID-19? The Tricky Road To Herd Immunity, Explained.

The Philadelphia Inquirer (1/8, Avril) reports that the possibility of life in the US returning to normal after achieving herd immunity has been "made all the more complicated by the emergence of two variants of the coronavirus that seem to spread more rapidly, one of which is already in the U.S." The Inquirer "spoke to three researchers who study the spread of infectious disease: Temple University epidemiologist Abby Rudolph, Drew University biologist Brianne Barker, and Pennsylvania State University biologist Maciej Boni." NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci "has estimated that the threshold for herd immunity from COVID may now be above 80."

Science Advocates' Wishlist For The Biden Administration.

The Scientist (1/7, Heidt, 157K) reports President Trump's "first budget proposal in February 2017...called for deep funding cuts at several scientific agencies, most notably the National Institutes of Health and the Environmental Protection Agency. Congress ultimately rejected those cuts and instead dedicated more funds to research and development, but it set a precedent for how Trump would prioritize scientific endeavors during the course of his term." The article says as "Joe Biden prepares to assume office, scientists are looking ahead to what the next four years may bring. The Scientist spoke to seven researchers and science policy advocates about their priorities for the new administration and what policies they would most like to see reversed." The piece mentions NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Chris Reed: On Pandemic Response, An A For The Scientists, An F For Governments.

In a commentary for the San Diego Union-Tribune (1/7, 587K), Deputy Editorial and Opinion Editor Chris Reed writes that American and German scientists deserve an "A" grade for their quick development of COVID-19 vaccines, while the US federal and state governments deserve an "F" for botching distribution of those vaccines. Reed writes, "Maybe the next time we have a pandemic, the scientists should be in charge of the paperwork and the logistics, not just the vaccine research – at least if the goal...is keeping people alive." He adds that NIAID Director Anthony Fauci this week "expressed not astonishment but extreme dismay at how little progress had been made in the United States in getting people vaccinated."

NHGRI Sets Plan to Diversify Genomics Workforce.

GenomeWeb (1/7) reports, "The National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) on Thursday released a" document, "detailing its plans to enhance the diversity of the genomics workforce by 2030." NHGRI Director Eric Green stated, "To reach its full potential, the field of genomics requires a workforce that better reflects the diversity of the US population. ... Our new action agenda aims to bring both short- and long-term changes that will make genomics a more inclusive discipline." In an accompanying commentary published in the American Journal of Human Genetics, NHGRI Senior Advisor to the Director on Genomics and Health Disparities Vence Bonham and Green "wrote that although the NHGRI has prioritized funding programs to increase the number of genomics-trained researchers from diverse groups, the genomics research workforce has seen limited growth in

the number of independent researchers from underrepresented backgrounds." They added that the problem is connected to "many broader societal issues related to inequities, health disparities, and injustices."

Scientists Identify Changes In Toxic Tau At Various Stages Of Alzheimer's Disease.

Neurology Today (1/7, Talan) reports scientists at Harvard Medical School "identified post-translational modifications of toxic tau protein in the autopsy tissue of patients diagnosed and confirmed postmortem with Alzheimer's disease by using novel high-resolution proteomics mapping technology." The findings were published in the December issue of Cell. National Institute on Aging Division of Neuroscience Director Eliezer Masliah, MD, said, "This study is important and timely and provides an explanation for the heterogeneity of AD based on defined and very specific molecular changes or PTMs in tau microtube binding domains [MTBs]. ... Nevertheless, this paper seems to provide strong evidence supporting a role PTM has on tau-related pathologies in AD heterogeneity."

Are Female Researchers Better Off with Male Mentors? Why Leading Scientists Say No.

Neurology Today (1/6, Cajigal) reports, "New research suggests mentors who are men have greater impact on the success of young women scientists than female mentors," but the study "generated a barrage of criticism from both women and women scientists – including neurologists – for what many say is good reason." The findings were published on November 17 in Nature Communications. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke Deputy Director Nina F. Schor, MD, PhD, FAAN, said, "The methods do not stand up. ... This is not based on emotion or politics, but the fact that the methods of this study are not scientifically sound." The article adds, "Dr. Schor said she was surprised the low survey response rate of 8 percent passed muster with the journal" and "also said it is not clear that the authors the researchers identified as mentors are in fact mentors."

NIH Studying Vaccines' Effectiveness Against New Covid Strains.

Bloomberg Law (1/8, Baumann, Subscription Publication, 4K) reports, "NIH scientists are studying whether Covid-19 vaccines will provide the same level of protection against new strains of the virus as they do against earlier strains, the agency's lead scientist on coronavirus said." NIAID Coronavirus Vaccine Program Scientific Lead Kizzmekia S. Corbett said she's "not as alarmed as the media would have us think" by the emergence of the new coronavirus strains in South Africa and the UK.

Additional Source. Bloomberg (1/8, Baumann, 3.57M) reports Corbett "made her comments Thursday night during an event on vaccines hosted by BlackDoctor.org."

PET Scans Reveal Vascular Inflammation.

MedPage Today (1/7, Walsh, 183K) reports, "Positron emission tomography (PET) provided objective evidence of response to treatment with tocilizumab (Actemra) in giant cell arteritis, according to" NIH researchers, including the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases' Kaitlin A. Quinn, MD. In a study "of 25 patients with active vasculitis, vascular inflammation was decreased over a median time of 1.1 years during treatment with tocilizumab using 18F-fluorodeoxyglucose (FDG) PET," the study revealed. The findings were published online in the journal Rheumatology.

Children's National Hospital, NIH Launch COVID-19 Diagnostics AI Challenge.

Becker's Hospital Review (1/7, Adams, 91K) reports, "Washington, D.C.-based Children's National Hospital is partnering with the National Institutes of Health and tech firm NVIDIA to launch a challenge in which participants will develop artificial intelligence tools to improve the detection of COVID-19 in the lungs, the hospital announced Jan. 7." Participants "will use a multi-institutional, multinational NIH dataset that houses data on patients with a diverse range of age, gender and disease severity to create AI-powered imaging models to help clinicians better identify and treat COVID-19 infection in patients' lungs."

NIAID Begins Phase 2/3 Clinical Trial Of Two Antibody Therapies For Mild Or Moderate COVID-19 Cases.

Homeland Preparedness News (1/7, Galford) reports, "ACTIV-2, a study sponsored by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), has begun phase 2/3 trials to evaluate two monoclonal antibody therapies that could help those with mild or moderate cases of COVID-19." The twin antibodies, which were developed by Brii Biosciences, "utilize synthetic versions of the antibodies humans naturally produce to bind to viruses and prevent them from infecting cells."

Effective COVID-19 Drug Treatments Remain Frustratingly Elusive A Year Into The Pandemic.

The Philadelphia Inquirer (1/8, McCullough) reports, "Therapeutic options for COVID-19 remain limited, reinforcing the vital importance of the new vaccines." Remdesivir, the only drug to receive full FDA approval as a COVID-19 treatment, "has shown modest benefit, at best, in hospitalized patients." Meanwhile, "two 'monoclonal antibodies' – synthetic versions of the body's own disease-fighting antibodies – have raised hopes for keeping high-risk patients out of the hospital, but the National Institutes of Health treatment guidelines say there aren't enough data to recommend them." The FDA "was criticized in August when it authorized emergency use of convalescent plasma for COVID-19," and "the NIH guidelines do not recommend plasma for any patients."

Opinion: 'Long' COVID's Not Waiting For Vaccine.

In an opinion in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution (1/7, 1.46M), Emory University School of Medicine Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine Jeffrey Siegelman writes that he has suffered "from months of debilitating symptoms" after contracting COVID-19 "with no end in sight." Siegelman adds, "Frustratingly, treatment for these symptoms is an exercise in trial-and-error, with the National Institutes of Health and others only just beginning to call for research on understanding the many forms of long COVID and how to treat them." He urges Americans to follow social distancing guidelines, concluding that "the vaccine that we've waited for...might not make a difference if you're already disabled from long COVID."

Gov. Hogan And The COVID Vaccine Blame Game.

The Baltimore Sun (1/7, 629K) editorializes, "Gov. Larry Hogan says he doesn't want to blame anyone for the slow rollout of the state's COVID-19 vaccination program. At one point, Maryland was ranked dead last in getting people the shots to protect against the deadly coronavirus. Not a good look for a state that's home to one of the top medical systems in the world, the National Institutes of Health and many individual leaders in COVID research." The Sun editorial board writes, "While Mr. Hogan doesn't want to point fingers, somebody needs to be held accountable for making sure as many people as possible are getting vaccinated. It's a matter of saving

lives, and ultimately the buck stops at the top. We suspect Mr. Hogan, who was slow to react to concerns, knows this and that it contributed to the revamped rollout plan he revealed Tuesday."

Colorado Researchers Received Almost Half A Billion Dollars In 2020 NIH Grants.

The Denver Business Journal (1/7, Nelson, Subscription Publication, 873K) reports in a paywalled article that researchers in Colorado received almost $500 million dollars in grants from the National Institutes of Health in 2020. According to the article, "The University of Colorado Denver received the majority of health research grants, including $1.8 million for projects specific to Covid-19."

Health & Medical News

Dems' Control Of The Government Paves Way For Liberal Priorities Such As Larger Stimulus Checks, More COVID-19 Relief And Healthcare Reform.

Bloomberg (1/7, Egkolfopoulou, 3.57M) reports Democrats are getting ready "to take control of the U.S. Senate, House and presidency, paving the way for Joe Biden to bring his legislative agenda to life and reshape the American economy." The article goes on to discuss "some of the key issues related to personal finances that Biden and the Democrats are likely to take up once they formally assume power." Among them are larger stimulus checks, additional COVID-19 relief, higher income taxes, healthcare reform, student loan debt, and the minimum wage.

Feds Getting Ready To Begin Next Round Of PPP Lending.

The New York Times (1/7, Cowley, 20.6M) reports, "The federal government released updated rules for lenders just before midnight on Wednesday for the next round of Paycheck Protection Program lending, but it did not set a date for when it expects to begin taking applications." Banks expect "the program could restart as soon as next week." The stimulus package which Congress approved in December "included $284 billion for new loans through the small-business relief program, which ended in August after distributing $523 billion to more than five million businesses." During "this next round, the hardest-hit [businesses] – those whose sales have dropped at least 25 percent from before the pandemic – can qualify for a second loan. First-time borrowers will also be eligible for loans."

Treasury Unveils $25B COVID-19 Rental Assistance Program.

The Hill (1/7, Lane, 5.69M) reports, "The Treasury Department has launched a $25 billion rental assistance program with funds from the $900 billion coronavirus relief package enacted last week, the department announced Thursday." State and other "governments covering more than 200,000 people are now eligible to apply for aid allocated to help struggling Americans cover rent and prevent landlords from racking up debt on tenants." According to Treasury, these entities can apply for funding for up to 15 months of rent for tenants.

Professors Say Eviction Crisis Is Also About Records Which Will Haunt Millions Of Americans For Years.

Sociology professor Barbara Kiviat and law professor Sara Sternberg Greene write in the New York Times (1/7, 20.6M), "Millions of Americans have fallen behind on rent during the Covid-19 pandemic, prompting the passage

of eviction moratoriums and rental assistance plans." However, "as policymakers have struggled to meet the needs of tenants and landlords, they've largely overlooked a crucial fact: The looming eviction crisis isn't just about falling behind on rent and losing one's home to eviction. It's also about the records of those events, captured in court documents and credit reports, that will haunt millions of Americans for years to come."

IRS Sending Stimulus Payments In The Form Of Prepaid Debit Cards To Some 8M Americans.

Bloomberg (1/7, Davison, 3.57M) reports the IRS is sending some "8 million of the $600 payments approved in recent stimulus legislation as prepaid debit cards." These "cards will go to some of the individuals who didn't receive their stimulus payment by direct deposit in the past week. The IRS has already sent more than $100 billion of the roughly $164 billion of the second round of stimulus payments approved by Congress in late December."

Politico (1/7, Becker, 6.73M) reports the IRS "also made some changes to how it will deliver the cards, after people complained last year that they threw away prepaid debit cards with the up to $1,200-per-person payments authorized by the CARES Act." This time, "envelopes containing this latest round of debit cards will prominently feature the Treasury Department seal, the department and the IRS said."

Florida Sets New Record For Number Of COVID-19 Cases In One Day.

The AP (1/7, Farrington, Lush) reports "Florida broke its record for the highest single-day number of coronavirus cases since the pandemic began, tallying 19,816 new cases on Thursday, while the state's death toll reached 22,400." State data "on Thursday showed the totals surpassed the previous single-day record, which was 17,783 cases on Wednesday." So far, "about 1.4 million people in Florida have contracted" coronavirus.

Colorado Confirms Two New Cases Of New Coronavirus Variant, One Potential Case.

The Denver Post (1/7, Seaman, 660K) reports "two more people in Colorado have confirmed cases of the new, more contagious variant of coronavirus, including a staff member at a skilled nursing facility in Aurora." The cases bring "the state's total to three." Colorado "officials also are investigating a potential fourth case of the new strain in another staffer" of the Veterans Community Living Center at Fitzsimons.

Arizona Reports Over 9,900 COVID-19 Cases, Almost 300 Fatalities.

The Arizona Republic (1/7, Steinbach, 1.05M) says "Arizona reported more than 9,900 new COVID-19 cases and nearly 300 new known deaths on Thursday as hospitals are overloaded by an unprecedented and growing number of patients with the virus." Arizona's "seven-day new-case average ranks highest nationwide for the third day in a row, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's COVID Data Tracker as of Wednesday." The state's "rate of new positive cases over the last seven days was 118.3 cases per 100,000 people."

Average Number Of Daily COVID-19 Cases Hits New High In Greater DC Region.

The Washington Post (1/7, Chason, Portnoy, 10.52M) reports "the number of new coronavirus infections continued to rise Thursday across the greater Washington region as the average number of recent daily cases set a record." Maryland, Virginia, and DC "added 8,617 new daily cases -- the third-most in a single day since the

start of the pandemic – sending the seven-day average soaring to 7,725." It is "the eighth consecutive day the recent average has risen across the region."

Number Of COVID-19 Cases Among Workers At Two In-N-Out Locations In Colorado Grows To 145.

The Denver Post (1/7, Shapiro, 660K) reports "recently opened In-N-Out Burger restaurants, the soon-to-open Meow Wolf and Pueblo's public safety departments are among the most notable settings in Colorado's latest COVID-19 outbreak report, released by state health officials Wednesday." According to the Post, "the Aurora In-N-Out outbreak was declared Dec. 17, with 62 staff members now confirmed to have tested positive for the virus." State officials "confirmed the Colorado Springs location's outbreak on Dec. 6 and there have been 83 positive employee cases." The "number of employee COVID-19 cases between the two In-N-Out locations grew to 145 from 122 over the last week, with most of the growth coming at the Aurora restaurant."

Connecticut Confirms State's First Two Cases Of New Coronavirus Variant.

The AP (1/7, Haigh) reports "the first two known cases of a new, more contagious variant of the coronavirus have been detected in Connecticut, the governor said Thursday." The two individuals, "described as between ages 15 and 25, live in New Haven County and each had traveled recently outside the state, one to Ireland and one to New York state." However, "genetic sequencing showed the cases are unrelated, the governor's office said." It is "believed there are likely more cases in the state."

Fox News (1/7, Hein, 23.99M) reports both patients "developed symptoms within three to four days of returning to Connecticut, Gov. Ned Lamont announced on Twitter Thursday." The governor "said the cases were discovered as part of a state health department enhanced surveillance testing strategy being run in collaboration with Yale University and The Jackson Laboratory."

The Hartford (CT) Courant (1/7, Brindley, Putterman, 438K) also reports on the story.

Texas Reports First Case Of New Coronavirus Variant In State.

The AP (1/7, Vertuno, Lozano) says "Texas reported its first known case of a person infected with the new variant of the coronavirus on Thursday." The infected individual "was identified as a Houston-area man who is between 30 and 40-years old who has no travel history." Authorities "said he was in stable condition and would remain in isolation until cleared by local health officials."

Fox News (1/7, Rivas, 23.99M) reports "the state health commissioner noted the case likely arose from ongoing community circulation." Texas Department of State Health Services Commissioner John Hellerstedt said, "The fact that this person had no travel history suggests this variant is already circulating in Texas. ... Genetic variations are the norm among viruses, and it's not surprising that it arrived here given how rapidly it spreads."

The Houston Chronicle (1/7, Jordan, 982K) also reports on the story.

Patients With COVID-19 "Dying In Unprecedented Numbers" In California As Medical Facilities Feel The Strain.

The AP (1/7, Thompson) reports "California Gov. Gavin Newsom's administration and the state's hospital association are at odds over how best to create space for critically ill coronavirus patients at already strained

medical facilities that soon could be overwhelmed by the expected surge of new cases from holiday gatherings." State health officials "reported Thursday 583 new deaths and a record two-day total of 1,042." A COVID-19 "surge following Halloween and Thanksgiving produced record hospitalizations and now the most seriously ill of those patients are dying in unprecedented numbers."

ICU Availability At Hospitals In California's Bay Area Drops To Lowest Level Yet. The San Francisco Chronicle (1/7, Ho, 2.44M) reports ICU availability at hospitals in California's Bay Area "fell to the lowest levels yet, dropping from 7.4% to just 3.5% as of Wednesday, according to state data." Overall in California, "intensive care unit capacity remained at 0%, including in the two hardest hit regions, Southern California and San Joaquin Valley." In the Sacramento region, ICU capacity dropped "from 11.1% to 9.2%, and ticked up slightly in the Northern California region from 24.4% to 25.4%."

Memo Tells Los Angeles County's Ambulance Crews To Not Transport Patients If Resuscitation Is Unsuccessful In The Field. The New York Times (1/7, Fink, 20.6M) reports that "with hospitals in Los Angeles County swamped with Covid-19 patients, a memo that went out to the county's ambulance crews last week caused public alarm and prompted explanations from medics on social media about their care practices." In the memo, "the county Emergency Medical Services Agency instructed the crews not to transport most adult patients whose hearts had stopped beating to a hospital if resuscitation in the field was unsuccessful or if the patients met established criteria for declaring death." The memo "was needed 'due to the severe impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on E.M.S. and 9-1-1 receiving hospitals,' Dr. Marianne Gausche-Hill, the agency's medical director, wrote in the directive."

COVID-19 Deaths Overwhelming California Funeral Homes, Causing Officials To Use Refrigerated Trucks To Hold Corpses. The Los Angeles Times (1/7, Lin, Money, Seidman, 3.37M) reports "the intensity of the pandemic continues to worsen, with the rising COVID-19 death toll overwhelming funeral homes and causing state officials to send refrigerated trucks across California to hold corpses." The National Guard was "called to Los Angeles County to help with the temporary storage of bodies at the county medical examiner-coroner's office, relieving pressure on hospital morgues and private mortuaries that have run out of storage space for bodies." According to the Times, "many hospital morgues are now filled with bodies, and officials are trying to move them for temporary storage at the county medical examiner-coroner's office."

Roughly One In Five COVID-19 Tests Performed In Los Angeles County Are Positive.

The Los Angeles Times (1/7, Money, Lin, Ormseth, 3.37M) reports roughly one in five "coronavirus tests performed daily in Los Angeles County are coming back positive, an astounding rate that officials say illustrates the pandemic's continued rampage through the region and foreshadows grave consequences for an already beleaguered healthcare system." Around the beginning of November, "only about 1 of every 25 tests confirmed an infection."

Health Leaders In Los Angeles County Concerned About COVID-19 Spread, Call For Immediate Behavioral Changes.

The Los Angeles Times (1/7, Lin, Money, 3.37M) reports "worried Los Angeles County health leaders said Wednesday that the region was rapidly losing its battle against COVID-19 as the virus spread unchecked, adding that only immediate and decisive changes in behavior can prevent a steep rise in deaths as a post-holiday surge hits and hospitals can't treat all who are sick." Los Angeles County Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer said,

"Today, I'm more troubled than ever before. ... This is a health crisis of epic proportions and we need everyone – I mean everyone – to use the tools right in front of them to help us drive down transmission of this deadly virus."

Study Finds COVID-19 Immunity Remains Strong Eight Months After Infection.

The Washington Post (1/7, Achenbach, 10.52M) reports that about 90% of the participants in a study published in the journal Science retained "a robust immune response to the coronavirus for at least eight months after an infection." The Post says the question of "whether people can get reinfected, and if so, how quickly" has remained one of the biggest concerns over the virus, with "isolated reports" of second cases, "and the new study bolsters the case that immunity usually persists." The study, which included nearly 200 patients, "also saw that multiple elements of the immune system – not just antibodies – continued to be effective at recognizing and responding to the virus." The study's authors "said they believe their findings would apply to the United Kingdom variant as well as the more common coronavirus."

Some Scientists Concerned That Mob Scene At Capitol May Have Been A COVID-19 Super-Spreader Event.

The New York Times (1/7, Mandavilli, 20.6M) reports that "some scientists" are concerned that "the mob that stormed the Capitol on Wednesday" may have created a COVID-19 "super-spreader event." Anne Rimoin, an epidemiologist at UCLA, said, "It has all the elements of what we warn people about. People yelling and screaming, chanting, exerting themselves – all of those things provide opportunity for the virus to spread, and this virus takes those opportunities."

The Hill (1/7, Hou, 5.69M) reports that before the "rioters stormed into the Capitol building," many people "in the crowd attended a rally put on by the president and gathered outside the Capitol. Many videos and photos of the people at the Capitol have surfaced, often showing people without masks or face coverings and standing in close proximity to others who were also maskless." According to the Hill, the events "could have been a superspreader event."

New Study Sheds Light On Likelihood Of Coronavirus Infection On Flights.

The New York Times (1/7, Carey, 20.6M) reports, "Given the variables, infectious disease specialists have had a hard time determining the risks of flying" amid the pandemic. However, "a study published on Wednesday provides some clarity." After an "18-hour flight from Dubai landed in Auckland, New Zealand, in September, local health authorities discovered evidence of" a COVID-19 "outbreak that most likely occurred during the trip." Using seat maps and genetic analysis, the study "determined that one passenger initiated a chain of infection that spread to four others en route."

Pennsylvania Confirms State's First Case Of Coronavirus Variant First Detected In UK.

Fox News (1/7, Hein, 23.99M) reports "Pennsylvania has confirmed its first case of the U.K. coronavirus variant in a Dauphin County resident who had known international exposure." The individual, "who was not identified by name, age or sex, had mild symptoms that resolved while isolating at home." Contact "tracing was performed and a case investigation was conducted, a news release posted Thursday said."

The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review (1/7, Guza, 245K) reports Secretary of Health Rachel Levine "said the state Department of Health has been working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to screen for the new variant, regularly sending 10 to 35 random samples of covid-19 tests to the federal lab in Atlanta."

The Allentown (PA) Morning Call (1/7, Greiss, 460K) also reports on the story.

New Mexico Launches Hotline For COVID-19 Vaccine Registration Questions.

The AP (1/7) reports that on Thursday, New Mexico "launched a new hotline to answer questions related to vaccine registration, as the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the state neared 152,000." New Mexico's "Health Department in recent weeks created a website where people can register to get the vaccine once it becomes more widely available. So far, nearly 300,000 people have signed up." New Mexico "officials said callers to the new hotline – 1-855-600-3453 – can ask questions about the registration process or get help signing up."

The Albuquerque (NM) Journal (1/7, McKay, 188K) reports "the call center is intended to help people who have had trouble registering for the vaccine online or can't access the internet." State residents "have reported mixed success with the website – cvvaccine.nmhealth.org – set up to manage the vaccinations."

Kentucky Governor Announces Budget Plan For Economy Hit Hard By COVID-19.

The AP (1/7, Schreiner) reports Gov. Andy Beshear (D) "proposed an infusion of aid into Kentucky's coronavirus-battered economy on Thursday evening, announcing an ambitious budget plan that includes down-payments on his long-running goals of raising salaries for teachers and boosting public education funding." The governor "urged the GOP-led legislature to quickly pass a separate virus relief bill," which "includes $220 million in aid for small businesses, $20 million for non-profit organizations and $100.9 million to help repay a federal loan that kept the state's unemployment insurance program afloat." In a different response to COVID-19, "Beshear said he will allocate $48 million of federal virus aid to help some of Kentucky's unemployed workers."

Massachusetts Has Nearly Doubled Number Of COVID-19 Vaccinations In A Week.

The Boston Herald (1/7, Tiernan, 327K) reports almost "140,000 Massachusetts residents – mostly coronavirus-facing health care workers but also inmates – have received their coronavirus vaccines, almost twice the number state health officials reported last week." Out of the people "vaccinated since Dec. 15, 80% – or 111,983 – work in hospitals on the front lines of the pandemic." A Thursday report "revealed 261 inmates were the first of the state's roughly 8,500 prisoners who are fourth in line to receive shots under Phase 1 of the state's three-phase distribution plan."

COVID-19 Testing Still "A Roller Coaster Ride" In Massachusetts; Providers Say It Could Become More Challenging.

The Boston Globe (1/7, Lazar, 1.04M) reports COVID-19 "testing throughout Massachusetts continued to be a roller coaster ride through the first days of the new year, marked by high demand, hard-to-come-by appointments, and an average turnaround time that at one point was more than three days." Healthcare "providers say there are even more challenges on the horizon." For example, "some taxed testing centers will soon have to juggle a massive vaccine rollout along with an already overwhelmed testing program."

Massachusetts Governor Backs Off Nurse Staffing Mandates In ICUs At A Number Of Hospitals.

The Boston Herald (1/7, Tiernan, 327K) reports Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker (R) and his administration are "backing off nurse staffing mandates in intensive-care units at some hospitals as coronavirus cases have more than doubled since Thanksgiving and daily case reports continue to shatter records." Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders "said...nursing mandates would be dropped 'effective immediately in hospitals with 'severe capacity constraints.'" The governor "said the easing of mandates around nurse staffing levels in over-stretched ICUs is 'crucial to ensuring that they can continue to provide the care to all the patients who need it as we battle this pandemic.'"

California Officials Tell Health Departments To Expand COVID-19 Vaccine Prioritization.

The Los Angeles Times (1/7, Shalby, 3.37M) reports that "in an effort to avoid wasting COVID-19 vaccine and help speed up the vaccine rollout," California officials are "instructing local health departments and providers to expand vaccine prioritization to community healthcare workers, public health field staff, primary care clinics, specialty clinics, laboratory workers, dental clinics and pharmacy staff." California officials have "also told officials that if a surplus remains even after all those eligible to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccine under expanded criteria have been granted access, they should move to Tier 1 of the next phase of distribution, which has not yet officially taken effect."

Minnesota Legislators, Parents Call For Mask Requirement For Youth Athletes To Be Dropped.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune (1/7, Klauda, La Vaque, 855K) reports "a state order requiring high school and youth athletes to wear masks while practicing and competing is not going over well with a group of Minnesota state legislators and supporters of the Let Them Play MN Facebook group." A letter dated January 6 "signed by 30 members of the Minnesota House of Representatives to Gov. Tim Walz urged that the mask requirement be dropped." Citing WHO and CDC guidance, "they said wearing a mask while participating poses 'a potential health risk to participants and may cause more harm than the intended good.'" A number of parents have taken "to social media to make similar claims."

Prison Officials In North Carolina Mull Rewards For Inmates Who Take COVID-19 Vaccine.

The AP (1/7, Anderson) reports "North Carolina prison officials are considering offering rewards to inmates who accept a coronavirus vaccine that will soon become available to them." Commissioner of Prisons Todd Ishee "said at a Thursday news conference that the Department of Public Safety is considering offering prisoners a greater number of guest visitations and other perks if they choose to get vaccinated." Ishee said, "We try to identify privileges that offenders want, so we're gonna kind of anchor things around that. ... We've got a number of options, but we have not gotten that far into the decision-making process. But I think it's very likely that we will put together some type of incentive package to encourage higher levels of participation."

Editorial Calls For Improvements In Virginia's COVID-19 Vaccine Capabilities.

In an editorial, the Richmond (VA) Times-Dispatch (1/7, 401K) says "there is no time for calm. Virginia must improve its COVID-19 vaccine capabilities." Officials in Virginia "have been criticized for a slow-moving rollout of the initial batch of 482,000 doses." The virus' spread "is outpacing the administration of the vaccine." The Times-Dispatch says, "While we respect the complexities of this rollout and we amplify the governor's message to be patient, these vaccines are too valuable. We cannot afford to underutilize them."

Ohio Governor Says Teachers, School Staff Will Receive COVID-19 Vaccines Starting February 1.

The Cleveland Plain Dealer (1/7, Bamforth, 1.22M) reports "Ohio teachers and school staff will be vaccinated" for COVID-19 "beginning Feb. 1, Gov. Mike DeWine said on Thursday, but first superintendents must sign a document stating intent to be in buildings in-person by March 1." Although "this can be in a hybrid or fully in-person plan, DeWine said...the signed agreement will define expectations that come with the vaccinations." The move "to vaccinate educators and staff is so students can return to in-person education, DeWine previously said."

Many Classrooms In California Reportedly Will Remain Virtual For Months.

The San Francisco Chronicle (1/7, Tucker, 2.44M) reports "many parents and public officials throughout California supported pushing the state's 1.4 million teachers and other education workers toward the front of the vaccine line, believing that would finally allow schools to reopen." However, the California "teacher's unions – as well as San Francisco's – have said vaccinations won't be enough and are calling for additional measures not endorsed by public health experts as necessary for students and staff to safely return to the classroom." Rather than "reopening, it's looking more likely that many, if not most classrooms will remain in virtual mode for months, if not until the fall, despite the vaccine."

California Nurses Pushed "To The Brink Of Burnout" As Hospitals Are Allowed To Bypass Nurse-To-Patient Ratios Law.

The AP (1/8, Rodriguez) reports, "Overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients in" California, many "nurses already stretched thin are now caring for more patients than typically allowed under state law after the state began issuing waivers that allow hospitals to temporarily bypass a strict nurse-to-patient ratios law – a move they say is pushing them to the brink of burnout and affecting patient care." Gov. Gavin Newsom's (D) "Department of Public Health began issuing temporary waivers of the law for a second time in December after another surge left hospitals in Southern California and the agricultural San Joaquin Valley with what is considered no intensive care capacity because of a lack of staffing."

Private Healthcare Workers Face Difficulties In Receiving Vaccines.

The Wall Street Journal (1/7, Wernau, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that many private physicians and healthcare workers without hospital associations have yet to receive the COVID vaccine, lacking information from authorities on how to find shots. According to the American Medical Association, around 54% of US physicians work in a private practice.

Bayer To Support CureVac's Coronavirus Vaccine Development.

The Wall Street Journal (1/7, Bender, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that Bayer is backing CureVac's coronavirus vaccine development with its expertise in developing drugs, dealing with regulators, and managing supply chains. According to CureVac, Bayer is also considering ways to help with manufacturing.

Tocilizumab Or Sarilumab Improves Survival Rates In Critically Ill Patients With COVID-19, Study Indicates.

Reuters (1/7, Kelland) reports researchers at Imperial College London found treating critically ill patients with COVID-19 with tocilizumab or sarilumab "significantly improves survival rates and reduces the amount of time patients need intensive care." The findings were shared on medRxiv.

Bloomberg (1/7, Kresge, 3.57M) reports the researchers found that 27% of patients who received the arthritis drugs died in the hospital compared to 36% who did not receive them. The trial "also raised hopes in the U.K., which helped fund the research, that using the arthritis medicines will ease the strain as a surge of virus cases swamps its health system."

The Financial Times (1/7, Gross, Subscription Publication, 1.48M) also covers the story.

Moderna CEO Says COVID-19 Vaccine Should Offer Immunity For "A Couple Of Years."

Reuters (1/7, Blamont, White) reports, "Moderna's COVID-19 mRNA vaccine is likely to offer protection of up to a couple of years, its chief executive said on Thursday, even though more data is still needed to make a definitive assessment." Speaking at an event, Stephane Bancel said, "The nightmare scenario that was described in the media in the spring with a vaccine only working a month or two is, I think, out of the window." He "added his company was about to prove that its vaccine would also be effective against variants of the coronavirus seen in Britain and South Africa."

Also covering the story are Fox News (1/7, Hein, 23.99M) and the New York Post (1/7, Manskar, 7.45M).

Sanofi Considering How It Could Help Produce COVID-19 Vaccine From Competitors.

Reuters (1/7, Blamont) reports that French pharmaceutical company Sanofi "is considering how it can help produce COVID-19 vaccines devised by other drugmakers, a spokesman said on Thursday." He "did not say which exact manufacturing steps could be performed nor if Sanofi was already holding talks with competitors." Vaccine production "requires multiple stages, from research to filling and packing."

Brazilian Researchers Find Sinovac Coronavirus Vaccine Is 78% Effective.

Reuters (1/7, Simões) reports on Thursday, researchers said that Sinovac Biotech's coronavirus vaccine "was 78% effective in a late-stage Brazilian trial and entirely prevented severe COVID-19 cases." The 78% rate "was below preliminary findings from Turkish researchers and lacked detailed data provided on U.S. and European vaccines." The article adds that Brazil and Indonesia "are preparing to roll out the vaccine, called CoronaVac, this month," while "Turkey, Chile, Singapore, Ukraine and Thailand have also struck supply deals with Sinovac."

The Wall Street Journal (1/7, Pearson, Magalhaes, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports the trial was conducted by the Butantan Institute in São Paulo.

The New York Times (1/7, Wee, 20.6M) reports that "in anticipation of approval, the vaccine, called CoronaVac, has already been shipped around the world as countries prepare for mass inoculation campaigns." Sinovac already "has sold more than 300 million doses."

The New York Times (1/7, Wee, Londoño, 20.6M) says that "unlike players from the United States, Chinese vaccine makers had to think globally almost from the start...because the outbreak had been largely stamped out in China." Chinese companies "have signed agreements with at least 15 countries and regions, providing early access to doses" in recent months, and "regulators in other countries that are conducting trials" for Sinovac have anticipated Brazil's results "because it had the biggest number of volunteers, at 12,476." Officials in Brazil "said they were hopeful" of emergency approval "within days," as the country "approaches a grim milestone: 200,000 deaths from the virus."

The AP (1/7, Savarese) and The Hill (1/7, Hellmann, 5.69M) also cover the story.

Pharma Companies Advised To Expect More Adverse Event Reports And Related Lawsuits.

FiercePharma (1/7, Sagonowsky, 12K) reports that with COVID-19 vaccines, "pharma companies of all stripes should brace not only for a wave of adverse event reports, experts say, but for lawsuits that could follow." Companies are advised to "step up efforts to gather as much 'quality information' as they can to quickly identify serious safety concerns." It is also the case that many of those receiving the vaccines early are "vulnerable people" who are "likely on multiple medications."

Scientists Identify Mutation That Might Make Coronavirus Vaccines Less Effective.

STAT (1/7, Joseph, 262K) reports scientists have identified a mutation, known as E484K, in a coronavirus variant found in South Africa and another variant found in Brazil that "changes a part of the virus that...antibodies get trained to recognize after" infection or vaccination. The article adds, "Lab studies show that the change could make people's antibodies less effective at neutralizing the virus," so the mutation raises "the possibility that the vaccines would be less effective, not that they won't work at all." The scientists shared their findings on bioRxiv.

Stem Cells May Hasten COVID-19 Recovery, Lead To Fewer Deaths, Study Suggests.

The Miami Herald (1/7, Cohen, 647K) reports University of Miami Miller School of Medicine researchers hope a swifter recovery from the most severe symptoms of COVID-19 and fewer COVID-19 related deaths "are a lasting result of a study UM led that used stem cells derived from umbilical cords to combat COVID." The findings were published in the Stem Cells Translational Medicine journal. According to the article, "The randomized controlled trial showed umbilical cord-derived mesenchymal stem cell infusions can safely reduce the risk of death and quicken recovery time for COVID-19 patients suffering the most severe conditions, according to the published results."

CDC Grants HealthPartners $2M To Monitor Safety Of COVID-19 Vaccine For Pregnant Women, Babies.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune (1/7, Snowbeck, 855K) reports that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has granted $2 million to a research division at the HealthPartners Institute "to monitor the safety of new COVID-19 vaccines for pregnant women and their babies." HealthPartners "will jointly lead the project with a researcher at Yale University."

Miami Physician Dies Two Weeks After Receiving Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine.

The Miami Herald (1/7, Vassalo, 647K) reports Gregory Michael, a 56-year-old obstetrician-gynecologist in Miami Beach, "died Sunday about two weeks after he received a COVID-19 vaccine." The Miami native "ran his own private practice at Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami Beach for 12 years, according to his website." The CDC "and the Miami-Dade Medical Examiner's Office are investigating the death." According to the article, "Pfizer, the manufacturer of the vaccine Michael received Dec. 18, said Michael died of a 'highly unusual clinical case of severe thrombocytopenia, a condition that decreases the body's ability to clot blood and stop internal bleeding.'"

Among other sources covering the story are the South Florida Sun Sentinel (1/7, Boryga, 525K), the Daily Caller (1/7, Ruane, 375K), the New York Daily News (1/7, Schladebeck, 2.51M), and the New York Post (1/7, Salo, 7.45M).

Primary Care Physicians Are "Being Driven Crazy" By Questions About When Patients Can Receive COVID-19 Vaccine, Physician Says.

Fox News (1/7, Rivas, 23.99M) reports cardiologist and primary care physician Dr. Thomas Lee, who practices at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, "told top editors of [the New England Journal of Medicine] that he and other primary care physicians are 'being driven crazy' by patients' calls and emails about when they will be able to receive the coronavirus vaccine." Lee said, "One thing that primary care physicians like me are being driven crazy by, are, we're getting emails and calls from patients saying, 'When can I get vaccinated?'" Lee "said that while some organizations can offer an explanation, detailing how patients can expect communication, others have yet to sort that issue out."

Portland Hospitals Forced To Throw Out Three Dozen COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.

The AP (1/7) reports, "Two Portland hospitals threw out more than three dozen doses of the COVID-19 vaccine altogether and state health officials were initially not aware of the wasted shots, according to a report." The doses wasted by Oregon Health & Science University and Legacy Health "reflect just 0.07% the vaccines administered in Oregon so far."

Next Phase Of COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Reportedly Will Be Less Simple.

The Atlantic (1/7, Zhang, 3.53M) reports,, "Since mid-December, the U.S. has distributed 21.4 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines; less than one-third have actually made it into people's arms." Although many of the many and varied problems are getting worked out, the article says that "the initial vaccine rollout is simpler than the phases to come because it targets hospitals and long-term-care facilities, where the relatively small number of eligible people are already concentrated." The article adds, "Finding and scheduling people in the next priority groups will bring a new tangle of logistics, for which the country is still not prepared."

Unemployment Claims Slipped To 787K Last Week.

The AP (1/7, Rugaber) reports the Labor Department said Thursday that initial claims for unemployment aid "fell slightly to 787,000" last week, "evidence of a job market stumbling in the face of the viral pandemic and the damage it has inflicted on the economy for nearly 10 months."

The New York Times (1/7, Cohen, 20.6M) says the fact that new claims for benefits "remained high last week" is "the latest evidence that the pandemic-racked economy still has a lot of lost ground to make up in the new year."

The Wall Street Journal (1/7, Morath, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) provides similar coverage, as do Reuters (1/7, Mutikani) and The Hill (1/7, Lane, 5.69M).

Physicians Call For National Hi-Fi Mask Initiative.

Abraar Karan and Ranu Dhillon, physicians at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School, writes in STAT (1/7, Daughton, 262K), "It will likely be months before enough Americans are vaccinated to stop the spread of SARS-CoV-2," so to help slow the spread of "a more-infectious variant, called B.1.1.7," Americans should wear a mask "in two high-risk scenarios ... being indoors with others outside of your immediate social bubble, in places like grocery stores, indoor malls, restaurants, churches, public transportation, and the like; and being outside in a crowd." But since "high-filtration (hi-fi) masks like N95 masks are the best protection against these small particles," the US "need[s] a National Hi-Fi Mask Initiative" to boost production of these masks.

Former EPA Scientist Urges National Plan For Wastewater-Based Epidemiology.

Christian Daughton, who retired from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Research and Development. writes at STAT (1/7, 262K), about "wastewater-based epidemiology (WBE)" which has been used "in Europe for tracking illicit drug use, and...for a variety of uses," but in the US "it has not been embraced at any level of government." Daughton argues that it should be used "for early warning of the emergence and spread of local Covid-19 infection." Daughton calls for "a national strategic plan for wastewater-based epidemiology."

Demand From Patients With COVID-19 Stressing Oxygen Supplies.

Kaiser Health News (1/7, Bichell, Weber) reports that demand from patients with COVID-19 "has stressed the infrastructure for delivering" oxygen "to hospitals and their patients." The problem is "multiple weak links in the pandemic supply chain" including limits "on the availability of both the portable cylinders that hold oxygen and the concentrators that pull oxygen from the air."

Walgreens Loses Foot Traffic, Still Beats Estimates For Quarterly Results.

The Wall Street Journal (1/7, Maidenberg, Terlep, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports Walgreens Boots Alliance executives on Thursday said pharmacy foot traffic has suffered as COVID-19 precautions thwart the seasonal flu and Americans forgo routine medical care and avoid stores. Walgreens reported first-quarter earnings that beat Wall Street estimates. Sales for the quarter rose year-on-year. Pharmacy sales in the US were up single-digits on a comparable basis. However, the company's Boots UK branch faced challenges linked to the coronavirus, included depressed traffic at shops after stricter restrictions were put in place in November.

Expert Says FDA Ignored Its Own Data In Warning Against Delaying Second Shot For Covid-19 Vaccine.

Inside Health Policy (1/7, Lienhard, Subscription Publication) reports behind a paywall that "a pharmaceutical prescribing expert tells Inside Health Policy that FDA ignored its own data when it warned earlier this week that allowing patients to go longer than the authorized three to four weeks between COVID-19 vaccine inoculations is not supported by current scientific evidence."

State Health Officials Say Federal Government "Overpromised And Underdelivered" On Vaccines.

CNN (1/7, Thomas, Langmaid, 89.21M) reports that the US "government 'overpromised and underdelivered' on coronavirus vaccine expectations, leaving states understaffed and without enough money to immunize their residents quickly, state health officials said Thursday." Dr. Steven Stack, "commissioner of the Kentucky Department for Public Health, told a briefing sponsored by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials: 'We only got a third of what we thought we were going to get based on the initial modeling.'" The federal government "confused states and the public by promising millions more doses than were actually delivered."

CDC Says It Has Administered Nearly 6M First Doses Of COVID-19 Vaccines.

Reuters (1/7, Roy) reports that the CDC "said it had administered 5,919,418 first doses of COVID-19 vaccines in the country as of Thursday morning and distributed 21,419,800 doses." The "tally of vaccine doses distributed and the number of people who received the first dose are for both Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech, vaccines as of 9:00 a.m. ET on Thursday, the agency said."

CDC Awards Contract To LabCorp To Study COVID-19 Virus Variants.

Bloomberg Law (1/7, Lin, Subscription Publication, 4K) reports behind a paywall that LabCorp "has been awarded a contract from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to provide genomic sequencing of samples of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19."

Opinion: Trump Has Taken Essentially Same Approach To Violence As He Has To Virus.

In an analysis for the Washington Post (1/7, 10.52M), National Correspondent Philip Bump writes, "On Wednesday, a violent mob stormed the U.S. Capitol to prevent Congress from finalizing President-elect Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 presidential contest. Four people died during the tumult, including a woman who was shot by law enforcement as she tried to climb through a broken window. The mob had been incited to action by months of rhetoric from President Trump and the conservative media claiming that the results of the election were suspect." Bump writes, "Also Wednesday, five people were reported to have died in the District as a less-immediate result of Trump's decision-making. They were a small part of the nearly 3,800 people nationally who died of covid-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus that emerged in the United States last year." Bump argues, "As the violence unfolded at the Capitol on Wednesday, Trump did nothing to intervene. As the virus has spread across the United States over the past few months, he has generally taken the same approach."

States Scramble To Vaccinate Residents As COVID-19 Rages Across Country.

The Washington Times (1/7, Howell, 626K) reports that the coronavirus "is on the rampage in the waning days of the Trump era, killing more than 3,000 people per day and sending states into a scramble to vaccinate people at stadiums, fire departments and elsewhere." Arizona "has emerged as a hot spot, with the most cases per 100,000 residents in the country over the past seven days, while the situation in Southern California has gotten so bad that responders in Los Angeles County told EMS workers to preserve supply of oxygen by delivering the minimum amount necessary to keep patients at 90% saturation." Texas "reported its first known case of a fast-

spreading U.K. variant on Thursday, and U.S. hospitals are more taxed than ever, with more than 132,000 patients admitted for COVID-19 as of Wednesday."

New York City Weighing Legal Options To Challenge State Rules That Have Stopped Coronavirus Doses From Being Used.

Bloomberg (1/7, Goldman, 3.57M) reports New York City is considering "legal options to challenge state vaccination rules that have left thousands of Covid-19 doses unused." The article adds, "Now that every eligible worker in the city's 11 public hospitals who wants to be vaccinated has received a shot, Mayor Bill de Blasio is pushing Governor Andrew Cuomo to give the city the freedom to expand eligibility for police, firefighters, correction officers and people over 75 to get inoculated," but Gov. Cuomo is resisting. Peter Ajeman, a spokesman for Gov. Cuomo, said, "The rules of the COVID vaccine distribution have been clear for many weeks and agreed to by virtually all credible federal and state leaders. The first priority is 1A, healthcare workers who are on the front lines."

New Mexico High Court Weighs Whether State Should Compensate Businesses Over Virus Rules.

The AP (1/7, Lee) reports, "In final written arguments published Thursday, New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's administration urged the state Supreme Court to reject demands that businesses be compensated for losses linked to pandemic-related public health orders." Attorneys "representing the governor's office and state Health Department say that enforcement of public health orders derives for a long-standing principle that property rights contain an inherent limitation not to use property in a manner that endangers others." A coalition of businesses "says pandemic restrictions have effectively seized private property from businesses that might otherwise have taken their own precautions against the spread of COVID-19."

Some Nebraskans 75 And Older Already Getting Vaccine Shots; State Says Online Registration To Launch Soon.

The Lincoln (NE) Journal Star (1/7, Olberding, 245K) reports, "While people age 75 and older in eastern Nebraska continue to wait and wonder when the COVID-19 vaccine will be available to them, areas of outstate Nebraska already have started vaccinating people in that group." Myra Stoney, "health director for the Southwest Nebraska Department of Public Health based in McCook, said it started vaccinating people in the 75-plus age group this week." Stoney "said vaccinations for those in the state's designated Phase 1A group – health care workers and residents of long-term care centers – are mostly complete in her district."

Meanwhile, the AP (1/7, Funk) reports that Nebraskans "who want to register for a coronavirus vaccination should be able to do so online or by phone soon, state officials said Thursday." Officials with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services "said they plan to launch their new registration website in about two weeks and a telephone hotline in roughly 10 days." The system "will allow people to register for a vaccine even if they aren't eligible right away, said Angie Ling, the department's incident commander for the pandemic."

The Omaha (NE) World-Herald (1/7, Anderson, 509K) also reports.

California Governor's Plan To Reopen Schools Clashes With Surging Pandemic.

The Los Angeles Times (1/7, Myers, 3.37M) reports, "With 1 in 3 students testing positive for the coronavirus in some Los Angeles neighborhoods, Gov. Gavin Newsom's push to reopen campuses is clashing with the reality of a raging pandemic as many school districts opt for January shutdowns and superintendents call for clearer guidance on when it will be safe to unlock their campus doors." Superintendents "from seven of the state's largest school districts on Wednesday called on Newsom to set a clear and mandated state standard for reopening campuses." They also "faulted Newsom's plan for seeming to rely on funds that would otherwise go toward important existing education programs."

Californians Urged To Stay Home; Out-Of-State Travelers Urged To Stay Away.

The Los Angeles Times (1/7, Money, Lin-II, 3.37M) reports Californians "are being urged to stay close to home – and residents of other states to stay out – under a new travel advisory issued in hopes of curtailing the raging spread of the coronavirus." Under the "updated guidance from the California Department of Public Health, issued Wednesday, Californians are told to eschew traveling anywhere in the state that's more than 120 miles from their residences, unless doing so is essential." Travelers "from other states or countries are also 'strongly discouraged' from coming to California, except for essential purposes."

FDA Says Curative COVID-19 Test Used In California At Risk For False Negatives.

The Los Angeles Times (1/7, Lau, Nelson, 3.37M) reports that a COVID test made by Silicon Valley-based Curative used "in Los Angeles and other parts of California may be producing inaccurate results, according to a warning" from the FDA issued Monday. The FDA's guidance "warns healthcare providers and patients that...the oral-swab tests...carries a 'risk of false results, particularly false negative results.'" The FDA advises the use of the test only on "symptomatic individuals within 14 days of COVID-19 symptom onset." The Times says the "warning appears to sharply contradict" Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti (D), who has disagreed with testing only symptomatic individuals, and raises "new questions about the accuracy of the city's reported COVID-19 positivity rates."

The Palm Springs (CA) Desert Sun (1/7, Hayden, 220K) reports as well.

HHS To Provide Illinois With $843M For COVID-19 Testing, Vaccinations.

Crain's Chicago Business (IL) (1/6, 175K) reports with coverage from Modern Healthcare that HHS "is doling out more than $22 billion to states and local jurisdictions by Jan. 19 to support COVID-19 containment and lagging vaccination rollouts, the federal government announced Wednesday." Illinois and the city of Chicago, "which is responsible for its own pandemic response, are getting a total of $843 million." More than $729 million "will aid testing, contact tracing and other mitigation efforts, while $114.5 million will support vaccination campaigns."

Michigan Ranks 11th In Number Of COVID-19 Vaccinations Given, CDC Data Show.

The Detroit News (1/7, Bouffard, 1.16M) reports that CDC data released on Wednesday "show that 35 states have administered more vaccine doses than Michigan, despite state officials' claims on Wednesday that the state ranks 11th for the number of initial shots given." At a Wednesday afternoon press briefing, Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, "Michigan's chief medical executive, said she'd spoken with the CDC just moments before and was told that the state ranked 5th-best in the state for the number of vaccines administered." But that ranking "wasn't borne out in the numbers posted by the CDC Wednesday night."

Minnesota Administers COVID-19 Vaccinations To More Than 91,000 Residents.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune (1/7, Olson, 855K) reports, "More than 91,000 Minnesotans have received first doses of COVID-19 vaccine amid a pandemic that has caused 5,572 deaths and 429,570 diagnosed infections in the state." The casualty totals "include 44 deaths reported Thursday by the Minnesota Department of Health along with 2,004 newly confirmed infections with the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19."

Pennsylvania County Official Lashes Out At Trump Administration Over Vaccine Delays.

The Philadelphia Inquirer (1/7, Kummer) reports that Camden County "has hired 50 people to administer COVID-19 vaccines to health-care workers and has a facility ready to inject up to 500 people a day. One major problem: It has no doses to give." Louis Cappelli Jr., director of the Camden County Board of Directors, "lashed out Thursday at the Trump administration, blaming it for what he said was a lack of coordination and leadership."

Wisconsin Lawmakers, Governor Wrangle Over COVID-19 Bill As Statewide Death Toll Tops 5K.

The AP (1/7, Bauer) reports that the Republican-controlled Wisconsin Assembly on Thursday "passed a doomed COVID-19 response bill that Senate Republicans and Democratic Gov. Tony Evers oppose, and there's no sign of an agreement on a plan to combat the virus that has killed more than 5,000 people in the state." Evers and Assembly Democrats "have their own proposals that Republicans do not support." The Legislature "hasn't passed anything related to the pandemic since April, and recent talks between Evers and Republican leaders failed to result in a deal."

Massachusetts Governor Extends Coronavirus Restrictions On Businesses For Two Weeks.

The Boston Globe (1/7, Andersen, 1.04M) reports that Gov. Charlie Baker (R) "said Thursday that the state is extending by two weeks the capacity restrictions on various industries to combat the spread of COVID-19, as Connecticut announced that two cases of the new, highly contagious coronavirus variant have been identified in that state." For most businesses, "he said, capacity limits will remain at 25 percent. Indoor and outdoor gathering limits will remain 25 people outside and 10 people inside, including for events."

The Boston Business Journal (1/7, Ryan, Bartlett, Subscription Publication, 881K) reports behind a paywall

Georgia State University Researchers Get $600K Grant From HHS.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (1/7, Miller, 1.46M) reports, "Researchers in Georgia State University's School of Public Health and Emory University's School of Medicine have received a $600,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to help nursing homes implement practices to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and stop the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, according to a press release." The funding "allows the public health team from the School of Public Health's Center for Leadership in Disability to collaborate with researchers from Emory University's School of Medicine and Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program to form Georgia's National Nursing Home COVID-19 Action Network."

Kansas Expects To Finish Giving Vaccinations To Nursing Home Residents, Health Workers By End Of Month.

The AP (1/7, Hollingsworth, Hanna) reports that Kansas "expects to finish giving COVID-19 vaccines to long-term care residents and health care workers by the end of this month and has moved people aged 65 and older into the next group to receive the shots." Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly on Thursday "announced new details about the order in which her state's residents will be eligible for inoculations, and making people aged 65 to 74 years an earlier priority was the biggest shift."

West Virginia Now Administering Second COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.

NPR (1/7, Noguchi, 3.69M) reports, "Having delivered vaccine to health workers and completed a first-round of shots at all its long-term care facilities, the state [of West Virginia] is now administering second doses and moving on to other populations, including people age 80 and over, and teachers who are 50 and older." AHCA/NCAL president and CEO Mark Parkinson said that "states eager to speed up the process should take note of the gubernatorial leadership in states like West Virginia and Connecticut that are doing well." Parkinson added, "What I would be doing if I was governor is I would be on speed dial with the CEOs of CVS and Walgreens every single day."

Florida Senator Calls For Congressional Probe Into Nursing Home That Allegedly Gave COVID-19 Vaccines To Wealthy Donors.

Politico (1/7, Fineout, Sarkissian, 6.73M) reports that Sen. Rick Scott (R-FL) on Thursday "called for a congressional investigation into what he called 'vaccine distribution mismanagement,' following multiple reports that a West Palm Beach nursing home and assisted-living facility steered highly sought after vaccine shots to its board members and major donors." Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) already "has been under fire for the bumpy rollout of vaccinations in Florida due to the Republican governor's insistence that those 65 or older be among the first to get inoculated with one of the Covid-19 vaccines." But Scott's "decision to wade into the controversy, even in a limited fashion, marks yet another instance in which the former Florida governor and his successor in Tallahassee have taken shots – some of them subtle, some of them not so subtle – at each other."

Fox News (1/7, Phillips, 23.99M) reports that in calling for the investigation, Scott described the nursing home's actions "absolutely disgusting."

San Antonio Officials Counting On State Supplying Second Dose Of COVID-19 Vaccines.

The San Antonio Express-News (1/7, Garcia, 685K) reports, "Only about 322 Bexar County residents have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, which means they've already received their second dose." That "leaves more than 39,000 people in the San Antonio area – mostly front-line health care workers and nursing home residents – still in need of the second dose to get full protection against the coronavirus." Local officials "are counting on the state's promise that enough vaccine will be available by the time the second dose is due despite limited supply."

Pennsylvania Officials Reverse Course, Call For Return To In-Person Instruction For Schools.

The AP (1/7, Rubinkam) reports that Pennsylvania schools "should consider a return to in-person instruction for elementary-age students, state health and education officials said Thursday, a change from previous state guidance that recommended online-only education in areas where the coronavirus is raging." Since the academic year began, state officials "have urged virtual instruction in counties with a 'substantial' level of community transmission – a number that rose rapidly as the virus surged this fall and winter." State officials "now want schools to consider bringing elementary students back to the classroom, saying that's where they belong."

CDC: Florida Among States That Have Delivered Fewer Than One Fourth Of Their COVID-19 Vaccines.

CNN (1/7, Holcombe, 89.21M) reports that Florida "has put state health centers in charge of rolling out Covid-19 vaccines, and with some opting for less organized plans, it's left seniors to deal with crashing websites, jammed phone lines and nights spent waiting in line." As of Tuesday, "about 19 million doses had been distributed nationally and 4.8 million administered, according to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention." Florida "is among 12 states that have administered fewer than a quarter of their vaccines."

Powerful Synthetic Opioid Fentanyl Played Major Role In Higher Number Of Deaths Among Homeless Population In L.A. County, Report Says.

The Los Angeles Times (1/7, Smith, 3.37M) reports, "A sharp rise in deaths of homeless people starting in the spring of 2020 was driven by drug overdoses involving fentanyl, a report released Thursday by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health concluded." During "the first seven months of 2020, 926 homeless people died in L.A. County, an increase of 26% over the same period in 2019." Data indicate "drug overdoses were responsible for just under 30% of homeless deaths in 2020, by far the leading cause." The article says, "Methamphetamine, determined to be involved in nearly two-thirds of those deaths, remained the dominant contributor," however, "the presence of the powerful synthetic opioid fentanyl in the mix of drugs generally found in a person's system more than doubled to 41%."

US Toughens Ban On Female Genital Mutilation.

Reuters (1/7, Batha) reports the US "has toughened its ban on the 'abhorrent practice' of female genital mutilation in a move campaigners hope will bolster efforts to end an ancient rite forced on millions of girls worldwide." Already, the US has "outlawed the widely condemned ritual, which dates back more than 2,000 years, but its first ban hit an unexpected legal roadblock so it moved to tighten the wording this week." The article adds that the law which President Trump signed "on Tuesday says the United States should lead the way, calling FGM 'a form of child abuse, gender discrimination, and violence.'"

Analysis Examines Failure Of Haven, The Joint Venture Between Amazon, JPMorgan And Berkshire.

The Wall Street Journal (1/7, Herrera, Benoit, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports according to existing and former employees at Haven, Amazon, JPMorgan Chase, and Berkshire Hathaway, the joint venture between these behemoths failed due to several central challenges such as high employee turnover, unanticipated competition and a lack of transparency in the healthcare industry, particularly with respect to costs.

Pregnant, Postpartum Black Women 45% More Likely To Die In The Hospital, Have Higher Heart Attack Risk, Study Finds.

The Chicago Tribune (1/7, Bowen, 2.03M) reports a study published in the Journal of the American Heart Association last month found that "Black women have the highest risk of pregnancy-related heart problems, even when adjusting for socioeconomic differences." For the study, researchers examined the "health records for 46 million hospitalizations of pregnant or postpartum women between 2007 and 2017. They found that Black women were 57% more likely to have a stroke, 45% more likely to die in the hospital and 23% more likely to have a heart attack." The article adds that in December, HHS unveiled "a plan to improve maternal health that includes getting blood pressure under control for 80% of reproductive-age women."

UnitedHealth Group Subsidiary Indicted On Antitrust Charges.

The Wall Street Journal (1/7, Kendall, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports a federal district court in Texas has indicted UnitedHealth Group subsidiary Surgical Care Affiliates on antitrust charges. Authorities allege the unit had long-term deals with rivals not to poach top-level employees from each other.

Study Indicates Identical Twins Are Not Genetically The Same.

The AP (1/7, Larson) reports, "Identical twins are not exactly genetically the same," according to a study published in Nature Genetics. For the study, researchers "in Iceland sequenced DNA from 387 pairs of identical twins – those derived from a single fertilized egg – as well as from their parents, children and spouses." This "allowed them to find 'early mutations that separate identical twins,' said Kari Stefansson, a geneticist at the University of Iceland and the company deCODE genetics." Data show that "on average, identical twins have 5.2 of these early genetic differences," however, "about 15% of identical twin pairs have more genetic differences, some of them up to 100, said Stefansson."

The Scientist (1/7, Offord, 157K) also reports on the story.

BioNTech Uses mRNA Technology To Prevent Disease Progression In Mice Models Of Multiple Sclerosis.

STAT (1/7, Garde, 262K) reports following the success of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna in developing mRNA-based vaccines to protect against coronavirus, scientists are wondering if similar technology could be used to treat patients with autoimmune disorders. In a study published in Science, BioNTech used mRNA strands "encased in a fatty envelope" to prevent disease progression in mice models of multiple sclerosis.

Experts Warn That Federal Appeals Court Decision Could Curtail "Skinny Labeling" And In Turn Access To Many Generic Drugs.

STAT (1/7, Silverman, 262K) reports a federal appeals court is being asked to review a panel decision made last October that experts say could impact the availability of many generic drugs. The panel's decision "threw into doubt a long-standing premise known as skinny labeling," which "refers to a move by a generic company to seek regulatory approval to market its medicine for a specific use, but not other patented uses for which a brand-name drug is prescribed." Experts say that if the practice of skinny labeling is curtailed, then access to many generic drugs could be reduced.

Sarepta Therapeutics Announces Mixed Results From First Clinical Trial Testing Gene Therapy For Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy.

STAT (1/7, Feuerstein, 262K) reports Sarepta Therapeutics "announced mixed results from the first randomized clinical trial of its gene therapy for Duchenne muscular dystrophy, raising questions about the path forward for the one-time, potentially curative treatment." In the trial, a single infusion of SRP-9001 "produced large increases in a crucial muscle protein typically missing in children born with Duchenne," however, "the increases failed to coincide with statistically significant improvements in muscle function for all patients after one year."

BioPharma Dive (1/7, Gardner) reports, "Executives had in recent months suggested they could discuss an accelerated approval with the Food and Drug Administration, should this trial and a separate, smaller study now underway succeed." The company "will continue the trial to a second stage, and will wait for that smaller study to read out results before meeting with the FDA." However, "the unexpectedly negative findings will weigh on the value investors put in Sarepta's gene therapy work."

Global Health News

Western European Countries Lag US, Britain In COVID-19 Vaccinations.

The Wall Street Journal (1/7, Dalton, Sylvers, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports coronavirus vaccination efforts in Europe are going slowly, leading to criticism of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy, which have all vaccinated far fewer people than have Germany, the UK, and the US.

Coronavirus In Europe Passes 25 Million Cases, With 559K Deaths.

Reuters (1/7, Abraham) reports, "Coronavirus cases in Europe surpassed 25 million on Thursday, according to a Reuters tally, with several countries reinstating or extending lockdowns." According to Reuters, Europe has had "at least 25,016,506 cases and 559,863 deaths since the start of the pandemic." Europe, says Reuters, has one "tenth of the world's population," and "nearly 30% of global cases and deaths." Germany "extended its nationwide lockdown until the end of January," while Italy extended its restrictions to January 15, and Greece "imposed a strict lockdown from Jan. 3 to Jan. 11."

WHO Europe Director Urges Stronger Measures To Control Spread Of Coronavirus.

CNN (1/7, Braithwaite, 89.21M) reports, "The World Health Organization (WHO) has called on European countries to intensify coronavirus measures" as "WHO Europe director Hans Kluge said Thursday that further measures were needed to 'flatten the steep vertical line' of rising cases." Kluge said that given the growing spread of the UK variant, "without increased control to slow its spread, there will be an increased impact on already stressed and pressurized health facilities."

Johnson: Nearly 1.5M People Have Been Vaccinated In The UK.

Reuters (1/7, Schomberg, Holden) reports on Thursday, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said that nearly "1.5 million people have been vaccinated against COVID-19" in Britain, and "that the government was increasing the number of places where people could get vaccinated and the number of people who could give the vaccination."

Head Of England's NHS Says Everyone Will Get Second Dose Of Coronavirus Vaccine.

Reuters (1/7, James, Schomberg) reports that Simon Stevens, Chief Executive of the England's National Health Service (NHS), "reassured people that they would get their second COVID vaccinations after some appointments were cancelled in order to prioritise giving out more initial doses of the shot." Stevens said, "People will get their second jabs (shots), whether that's Pfizer or AstraZeneca." Stevens also said "that the reprioritisation of shots would mean that twice as many people would be offered first doses of the vaccine over the next several weeks."

FDA Adviser Opposes UK Plan To Delay Second Dose. ABC News (1/7, Ordonez, Woodruff, 2.44M) reports, "The U.K. plans to postpone giving the required second dose of their authorized vaccines by up to 12 weeks – an attempt to hasten distribution of the first dose." Dr. Paul Offit, a member of the Food and Drug Administration's Vaccine Advisory Committee, called it a "Bad idea," because, he said, "You're disrupting a program." Offit added, "It's making a mistake to just delay the second dose because it sends a subtle message that the second dose perhaps isn't so important – whereas it's critically important because that is what gives you the protection, and likely longer-term protection, you need from these vaccines."

UK Working With Pfizer And AstraZeneca To Boost Supplies Of Coronavirus Vaccines.

Reuters (1/7, Smout) reports on Thursday, UK Health Minister Matt Hancock said that "the government is working with both Pfizer and AstraZeneca to increase supplies" of their coronavirus vaccines as part of its "ambitious target to inoculate more than 13 million people who are elderly, vulnerable or frontline workers by mid-February." Hancock said, "The manufacturers are doing a brilliant job, and they're delivering to the schedule that's agreed, but that schedule is the amount of vaccine that we have ... we expect to see that amount of vaccine being delivered going up."

England's NHS To Use London Field Hospital Built In Spring For Pandemic.

The AP (1/7) reports that NHS England Chief Executive Simon Stevens said Thursday that the NHS "will from next week employ a little-used field hospital specially built" at the ExCel London, and "a few hundred beds for non-COVID patients are expected to be available at first." The hospital "was one of several built in the spring to help during the pandemic," but "they were barely used and were mothballed."

UK To Ban Travelers From Southern African Countries For Two Weeks.

Reuters (1/7) reports, "The United Kingdom said on Thursday it would extend a ban on travellers entering England to southern African countries in a measure to prevent the spread of a new COVID-19 variant identified in South Africa." The ban will be imposed for two weeks beginning Saturday.

French PM Announces Further Closings.

Reuters (1/7, Kar-Gupta, Blamont) reports that French Prime Minister Jean Castex "said restaurants, cinemas and museums would remain closed throughout January and ski resorts might not reopen before the February holidays." Castex also said "that he could not rule out a further nationwide tightening of measures."

French Health Minister Says Labs Are Tracking New Coronavirus Variants. Reuters (1/7, Kar-Gupta) reports, "French Health Minister Olivier Veran said on Thursday that all laboratories had been mobilised to track the new variants of the coronavirus in France."

France Focused On Allaying Public Concerns About Coronavirus Vaccine. The Washington Post (1/7, Noack, 10.52M) reports that "France had by Sunday only administered about 500 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine," and 19,500 by Wednesday, compared to "more than 370,000 in Germany." The slow rollout in France "was blamed largely on bureaucratic obstacles. But those obstacles were no accident." They were part of an effort to respond to "public concerns" about the vaccine, and include "multiple layers of precautions – mandating that recipients engage in an often time-consuming consultation process before getting a shot, which could only be administered by a doctor or a health worker under direct supervision of a doctor." France is also "moving ahead with plans to form a vaccine council of 35 ordinary French citizens."

Merkel Says Worst Months In Pandemic May Be Ahead.

Bloomberg (1/7, Blackman, Kresge, 3.57M) reports that German Chancellor Angela Merkel "warned that 'the most difficult months' in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic still lie ahead." But, added Merkel, "there is a glimmer of hope in that vaccines are now available."

WHO's O'Brien Says COVAX To Start Delivering Vaccines By End Of January Or Early February.

Reuters (1/7, Miller) reports, "Poorer nations could start receiving COVID-19 vaccines as soon as this month from a World Health Organization-backed programme aiming to divvy up shots fairly to help end the pandemic, WHO immunization director Kate O'Brien said on Thursday." O'Brien also said that the "COVAX facility has raised $6 billion of the $7 billion that it has sought in 2021 to help finance deliveries to 92 developing nations with limited or no means to buy vaccines on their own." O'Brien added, "The facility has access to over 2 billion doses of vaccine," and, she said, "We will start to deliver those vaccines probably by the end of January, and if not, then certainly by early February and mid-February."

WHO Europe Director Says Report On Italy's Coronavirus Response Should Have Been Shared With Government Before Publication.

The AP (1/7, Winfield) reports the World Health Organization Europe Director Dr. Hans Kluge on Thursday "denied...that Italian officials pressured it to spike a report into Italy's coronavirus response but said the U.N. agency should have shared the document with Italy's government before publishing it." Kluge "said the agency's procedures had been 'overlooked,' as he sought to explain WHO's decision to pull the report from its website a day after it was posted May 13." Meanwhile, "the report's lead coordinator...has said an Italian WHO official pressured him to falsify the date of the pandemic plan." The WHO had earlier "said the report was removed because it contained unspecified 'factual inaccuracies' and wasn't reposted because a different review process was adopted instead."

Israel, Pfizer Enter New Agreement To Help Complete Coronavirus Inoculations By March.

The New York Times (1/7, Rasgon, 20.6M) reports, "In a boost to Israel's vaccination campaign, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced on Thursday that he had reached an agreement with Pfizer that will enable all Israelis above age 16 to be inoculated against Covid-19 by the end of March." Netanyahu "made the remarks hours before Israel was set to tighten its current lockdown in hopes of staving off the new, highly transmissible variant of the coronavirus," and said, "We are going to be the first country to beat the coronavirus." The Times

says, "The vow came after days in which health officials warned that Israel's supply of vaccines was dwindling." Over 18% "of Israel's population has already received the first dose...a rate that has far outstripped the rest of the world and buoyed Mr. Netanyahu's battered domestic image."

Israel's Vaccine Rollout Raises Questions Over Obligations To Palestinians. The Wall Street Journal (1/7, Schwartz, Lieber, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that experts are questioning whether Israel has an obligation to provide COVID vaccines to Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has projected that the country will immunize its entire adult population by the end of March, while the West Bank and Gaza, which rely on outside aid, are awaiting assistance from the World Health Organization's Covax program, which is expected to launch in March at the earliest.

South Africa Announces Purchase Of 1.5M Doses Of AstraZeneca Vaccine.

The AP (1/7, Meldrum) reports that South Africa "will import 1.5 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine to inoculate the country's health workers," in its "first announcement of the purchase of a COVID-19 vaccine." The doses are to come from the Serum Institute of India, with 1 million in January and the remainder in February.

Lebanon Imposes 25 Day Lockdown.

The AP (1/7) reports on Thursday, "Lebanon began a 25-day nationwide lockdown...as infections hit a record...and patients overwhelm the health care sector." The lockdown, the country's third since February, "closes most businesses and limits traffic" and "reduces the number of flights at the country's only international airport."

South Africa Announces Deal For 1.5M Doses Of AstraZeneca-Oxford Coronavirus Vaccine.

The Wall Street Journal (1/7, Steinhauser, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports on Thursday, South Africa announced that it will receive 1 million doses of the AstraZeneca-Oxford coronavirus vaccine in January from the Serum Institute of India, and 500,000 in February. South Africa decided to bypass its own regulatory procedures to speed the distribution of the vaccine. One reason is that none of the makers had applied for approval in South Africa.

Top Pharmacy Chains Plan To Offer Inoculations. Reuters (1/7, Dludla) reports, "South Africa's two biggest pharmacy chains Clicks Group and Dis-Chem Pharmacies said they plan to offer COVID-19 shots at their stores and provide storage and distribution facilities in the vaccine rollout programme once the government provides more details." So far, Health Minister Mkhize has only "said...that the country plans to vaccinate 40 million people within a year to achieve herd immunity."

Kenya To Begin Receiving Coronavirus Vaccine Next Month.

The AP (1/7, Odula) reports, "Kenya's health minister says the country is expected to start receiving 24 million doses next month of the COVID-19 vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University." The vaccine is "being obtained through the COVAX facility."

Brazil Passes 200,000 Reported Deaths From COVID-19.

Bloomberg (1/7, Leite, Aragaki, 3.57M) reports, "Brazil's coronavirus death toll passed 200,000" as "Brazil's Health Ministry reported 1,524 deaths" as well as 87,843 new cases. Meanwhile, "Brazil has yet to even approve the use of a vaccine."

The AP (1/7, Savarese, Jeantet) reports that Brazilians filled the beaches over Christmas and New Years as Summer began Dec. 21st, and "intensive-care units in many cities are once again slammed with COVID-19 patients."

Argentina's New Restrictions To Be Announced Friday.

Reuters (1/7, Otaola, Raszewski) reports on Thursday, Argentina announced there would be new restrictions on movement "during night hours" after reporting 13,441 new cases on Wednesday, "up dramatically from 5,200 reported a month earlier." The measures are to be announced on Friday.

Mexican Official Travels To Argentina To Discuss Sputnik V.

Reuters (1/7, Esposito) reports that Mexico's Deputy Health Minister Hugo Lopez-Gatell "traveled to Buenos Aires to discuss COVID-19 vaccines with Argentine President Alberto Fernandez, whose government has begun administering Russia's Sputnik V."

Canadian Officials Face Consequences Of Traveling While Advising Others Not To.

The New York Times (1/7, Porter, 20.6M) reports, "More than a dozen Canadian politicians have been pilloried and punished since New Year's Eve for taking tropical vacations and family trips outside of the country while most of the nation has hunkered under lockdowns." The Times says that "Canadians have been seething over the past week, as one repentant politician after another apologized for taking trips out of the country." The officials have also "faced political consequences, losing ministerial posts and spots on important political committees." They have been found in all parties.

Japanese PM Announces State Of Emergency For Tokyo Area.

The Washington Post (1/7, Denyer, 10.52M) reports, "Japan's leaders believed they had found a way to live with the coronavirus and keep the economy open, relying on widespread mask-wearing and sensible precautions without resorting to mandatory lockdowns." On Thursday, "Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga reluctantly declared a state of emergency in the Tokyo area." The restrictions "include asking restaurants and bars to close early, requesting residents to refrain from non-urgent outings, and limiting attendance at sports and other events to 5,000 people, at least until Feb. 7."

Many Australian Citizens Still Abroad Due To Closed Border, Limited Flights.

The Wall Street Journal (1/7, Glynn, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that with the controls adopted by Australia, with 28,500 reported cases, to combat the coronavirus, nearly 10 months after closing its border last March, around 39,000 Australians remain overseas, while 430,000 have returned home. To help, the government has subsidized some Qantas Airways flights, and lent money to those who could not afford flights.

Australia Imposes Three-day Lockdown In Brisbane. Reuters (1/7, Packham, Jose) reports that "Australia's Queensland state will enforce a three-day lockdown in Brisbane, the state capital, from Friday evening after a quarantine hotel worker tested positive for the more contagious variant of COVID-19 that has

emerged in Britain." Under the lockdown, "Brisbane's more than 2 million residents must wear masks and can go outside only for one of four essential reasons – grocery shopping, work, exercise or medical treatment."

Research Suggests Three Times As Many As Reported May Have Been Infected With Coronavirus In Wuhan, China.

Reuters (1/7, Stanway) reports on research indicating that "the number of people who have been infected with COVID-19 in the Chinese city of Wuhan...could be around three times the official figure." The researchers, who live in Wuhan, "analysed blood samples from more than 60,000 healthy individuals taken from locations across China from March to May 2020." The analysis showed "that 1.68% of those from Wuhan contained antibodies for SARS-CoV-2...compared to 0.59% in surrounding Hubei province and 0.38% in the rest of China." The findings were published in PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases.

UK Professor Offers Ideas For Addressing Coronavirus.

Christina Pagel, professor of operational research and director of the Clinical Operational Research Unit at University College London, writes in the Washington Post (1/7, Pagel, 10.52M), about the UK response to the new coronavirus variant, saying that "the new lockdown should be enough to slow growth, but given the higher infectiousness of the new variant, it is very possible this will be not be enough to actually drive new cases down." To do that, Pagel argues that "isolating new cases and their contacts through effective contact tracing is crucial." She also calls for "paying essential workers to isolate for 10 days and offering accommodations where needed," for "stricter border controls," including "an enforced 14-day quarantine," and for "ramp[ing] up vaccination to the whole population as quickly as possible."

Rights Experts Warn South Africa's Plan To Capture Babies' Biometrics Could Be Risky Without Tough Safeguards.

Reuters (1/7, Harrisberg) reports, "Plans to photograph and fingerprint every baby born in South Africa for a digital register could lead to data leaks and identity theft without robust safeguards, rights experts said on Thursday." The government intends "to capture detailed biometrics – unique physical traits – of every child born in South Africa and link this data to parents' identity numbers, which are printed on all ID documents." The country "hopes the new registration system will prevent corrupt officials selling birth certificates to foreigners to illegally secure South African citizenship and protect children who otherwise risk going undocumented."

More Brazilian Women Going To Argentina For Abortions.

The AP (1/7, Biller, Calatrava, Pollastri) reports there is a growing trend of Brazilian women going to Argentina to obtain abortions given that their country has a ban on the procedure. The article says at the end of December, Argentina passed landmark legislation legalizing abortion, becoming "the largest Latin American nation to do so." This "underscores not only how Argentina's progressive social policy diverges from Brazil's conservative one, but also the likelihood that more Brazilian women will seek abortions in the neighboring nation."

Toxic Air In India, South Asian Countries Linked To 350,000 Miscarriages, Study Suggests.

Reuters (1/7) reports new research indicates "toxic air in India and other South Asian countries could be causing large numbers of miscarriages and stillbirths." The study "estimated nearly 350,000 pregnancy losses a year in

South Asia were linked to high pollution levels, accounting for 7% of annual pregnancy loss in the region between 2000 and 2016." The findings were published in The Lancet medical journal on Thursday.

India's Tobacco Industry Will Object To Proposed Changes To Anti-Smoking Law.

Reuters (1/6, Kalra) reported the tobacco industry in India "will object to a proposal to ban smoking zones in hotels and prohibit advertising at cigarette kiosks as the government steps up anti-smoking efforts, two executives said on Wednesday." The proposal would also ban smoking zones in restaurants and airports, and it "calls for increasing the minimum legal smoking age from 18 to 21. ... The draft changes have also tightened existing provisions to ban advertising at kiosks and prohibit sale of loose cigarette sticks, which form the bulk of the sales."

HHS in the News

Azar Says States Can Begin Distributing COVID-19 Vaccines To Other Groups.

Fox News (1/7, Rivas, 23.99M) reports, "Amid criticism of a growing number of unused coronavirus vaccines sitting on shelves nationwide, a top federal official said Wednesday states should vaccinate older, vulnerable Americans." HHS Secretary Alex Azar said, "States can also accelerate vaccine administration by moving on to providing vaccinations to broader populations right now. ... There is no reason that states need to complete, say, vaccinating all health care providers before opening up vaccinations to older Americans or other especially vulnerable populations." Although a CDC panel recommended "prioritizing front-line medical workers and long-term care facilities first, states ultimately decide who should be first in line for vaccines."

Health Experts, Political Leaders Rethink Strict Prioritization Amid COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.

Axios (1/8, Owens, 1.26M) reports "some political leaders and public health experts are rethinking strict prioritization for coronavirus vaccines, suggesting that it might make more sense to simply try to administer as many doses as possible as quickly as possible." As supplies remain "limited, there's an inherent tension between trying to focus first on the people most at risk from the virus – including those most likely to spread it – and getting shots into arms at maximum speed." HHS Secretary Alex Azar said this week, "It would be much better to move quickly and end up vaccinating some lower-priority people than to let vaccines sit around while states try to micromanage this process." Meanwhile, "Surgeon General Jerome Adams echoed this sentiment, saying that if states have exhausted the demand from one priority group or one location, they should quickly move to the next one."

Federal Health Officials Aim To Speed Up COVID-19 Vaccinations.

Reuters (1/7, Caspani, Maan) reports "U.S. health officials sought to speed up the sluggish pace of COVID-19 vaccinations on Thursday." About "6 million people across the United States had received a first injection of the two-shot vaccines" by Thursday, "accounting for less than one-third of more than 21 million doses shipped to date, according to the" CDC. That figure "falls far short of the 20 million vaccinations the U.S. government had vowed to administer by the end of 2020." On Wednesday, Reuters says, "top health officials announced plans to start distributing COVID-19 vaccines through pharmacies around the country earlier than expected this week as

states have struggled to administer supplies they have received." HHS Secretary Alex Azar "told governors to not let vaccines go unused due to policies requiring healthcare workers get the shots first."

Court Concurs Hospitals Cannot Challenge HHS' Calculation Of Adjustments To Medicare Reimbursements For Uncompensated Care.

Bloomberg Law (1/7, Pazanowski, Subscription Publication, 4K) reports the ACA prevents "hospitals from challenging HHS Secretary Alex M. Azar II's calculation of adjustments to Medicare reimbursements for uncompensated care provided to low-income Americans, a federal court in Washington said." The article adds that HHS' "Provider Reimbursement Review Board lacked jurisdiction to consider the hospitals' objections to their payments, and thus properly dismissed their request for review, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia said Thursday."

Democratic Governors Want Feds To Release Remaining COVID-19 Vaccine Doses.

Politico (1/7, Lim, 6.73M) reports eight Democratic governors "are demanding that federal health officials release doses of Covid-19 vaccines currently being held back to ensure people who got their first dose can get their second." The federal government took this action "to ensure that everyone who is vaccinated completes the recommended two-shot sequence," however, "with a new, likely more transmissible coronavirus strain now circulating, public health experts have urged state and federal authorities to pick up the pace of vaccination." An HHS spokesperson told Politico, "Operation Warp Speed is continuing to ensure second doses are available to vaccine administration sites, at appropriate intervals, as directed by jurisdiction leaders. ... There will always be a lag between shots allocated and those ordered, between those ordered and those delivered, between those delivered and those administered, and between those administered and reported as administered."

Crain's Chicago Business (IL) (1/7, Goldberg, 175K) reports that Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker (D), joined by "Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers, California Gov. Gavin Newsom, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee and Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly," wrote to HHS about releasing the remaining vaccines.

Inside Health Policy (1/7, Wang, Subscription Publication) reports that the governors sent the letter to HHS Secretary Alex Azar and Operation Warp Speed Chief Operating Officer Gen. Gustave Perna.

WILX-TV Lansing, MI (1/7, Reed, 61K) also reports on the story.

Hospital Group Decries "Slow Pace" Of US COVID-19 Vaccinations.

Bloomberg (1/7, LaVito, 3.57M) reports, "As the U.S. grapples with record hospitalizations and deaths from the Covid-19 pandemic, a crucial vaccination rollout campaign is being impeded by inconsistent messaging and myriad state strategies as a new variant of the virus drives up infection rates, according to public health experts." The missteps "have put the number of vaccinations well behind targets set by the Trump administration's U.S. Operation Warp Speed effort." About 5.46 million doses "have been administered in the U.S. since mid-December, or 32% of those that have been distributed across the country and well below the Trump administration's goal of 20 million by the end of 2020, according to data compiled by Bloomberg News."

The Hill (1/7, Sullivan, 5.69M) reports that the American Hospital Association on Thursday "called on the Trump administration to take action to speed up coronavirus vaccinations, saying it is concerned about the 'slow pace' so far." Hospitals "are at the center of the first stage of vaccinations, for health care workers, but they said

in a letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar that they 'have seen a number of barriers' so far." Richard Pollack, the CEO of the American Hospital Association, "wrote that there are problems with lines of communication."

Also reporting are CNBC (1/7, Feuer, 7.34M), Forbes (1/7, Porterfield, 10.33M), FierceHealthcare (1/7, King, 150K), and Bloomberg Law (1/7, Pugh, Subscription Publication, 4K).

COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Has Reportedly Been Slow Inside Nursing Homes.

USA Today (1/8, Weintraub, Leys, 12.7M) reports "nursing homes have been slow to roll out COVID-19 vaccines, but federal, pharmacy and nursing home officials said they are on track to finish the job before the end of the month." Roughly "16% of vaccines distributed for use in nursing homes have been injected into residents and the staff who care for them, according to data from the" CDC. However, HHS "Secretary Alex Azar said those figures underestimate actual vaccinations, because there is a lag between the time shots are given and when they are recorded." He also "said the pace of vaccination has been slowed by the need to get consent forms from residents or their family members, but he expects vaccination rates to speed up soon."

Taiwan Welcomes Visit Of US Ambassador To UN.

The AP (1/8, Wu) reports "Taiwan said Friday it welcomed the visit of the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations in the closing days of the Trump administration, in a move that brought China's renewed condemnation of Washington." From January 13 to January 15, "Kelly Craft will visit Taipei, the island's capital." According to the AP, "the U.S. Mission to the United Nations said Thursday the visit would 'reinforce the U.S. government's strong and ongoing support for Taiwan's international space.'" The piece mentions that HHS Secretary Alex Azar visited Taiwan in August.

Counties With In-Person University Classes Experienced Significant Increase In SARS-CoV-2 Cases, CDC Study Says.

CNN (1/7, Howard, Christensen, 89.21M) reports researchers found that "counties where large colleges and universities opened for in-person classes in the fall suffered a significant rise in the incidence of [SARS-CoV-2], according to a new" CDC study. The researchers found that counties with institutions that began in-person instruction "experienced a 56% increase in incidence" within three weeks.

The New York Times (1/7, Rabin, 20.6M) reports "the incidence of new coronavirus cases was generally declining in early August, the researchers said, though rates among adults aged 18 to 22 were on the rise." Rates of infection "went on falling – by an average of 18 percent – where large universities chose to teach remotely, the researchers found, but the rates shot up where in-person instruction was underway." However, "researchers did not take account of whether students were physically present on campus, even if classes were being held remotely, Dr. Lisa Barrios, a member of the C.D.C.'s Covid-19 response team, pointed out."

The Washington Times (1/7, Tan, 626K) reports "infections increased from 15.3 per 100,000 people to 23.9 per 100,000 from the 21 days before in-person classes began up to three weeks after classes began, according to" the data. Meanwhile, "counties with online-only colleges reported a 17.9% drop in infections, from 17.9 to 14.7 per 100,000, during the same period."

Giroir To Remain In His Trump Administration Position Until Day Before Inauguration Day.

Inside Health Policy (1/7, Lienhard, Wang, Subscription Publication) reports "HHS Assistant Secretary for Health and White House COVID-19 testing czar Brett Giroir said he will remain in his position with the Trump administration until Jan. 19, the day before...Joe Biden's inauguration." Until then, Giroir "will work with Biden's staff to ensure a smooth transition, Giroir told reporters Thursday (Jan. 7). Moncef Slaoui, Operation Warp Speed's chief scientific adviser, also has said he will stay on and help with the Biden transition."

Giroir Says HHS "Very Confident" Better COVID-19 Testing System For Congress Will Be In Place Before Inauguration Day.

Inside Health Policy (1/7, Lienhard, Subscription Publication) reports "HHS Assistant Secretary Brett Giroir said the department is 'very confident' an improved congressional COVID-19 testing system will be in place in time for President-Elect Joe Biden's inauguration, coming after FDA warned earlier this week that the test currently used by members of Congress could be faulty." Giroir "also said the new, more contagious strains of COVID-19 found in the United Kingdom and South Africa are still detectable by current U.S. testing systems."

Surgeon General Speaks To Pace Of COVID-19 Vaccinations.

The Dr. OZ Show (1/7, 837K) reports with a two-part videotape interview with US Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams. The interview covers subjects ranging from the distribution of COVID-19 vaccine doses to the FDA's role in oversight of vaccinations. The second part of the interview is available here (1/7, 837K).

HHS Funding Extended Until April For Virus Testing In At-Risk Areas.

Bloomberg (1/7, Lee, Court, 3.57M) reports that a $550 million funding extension "announced Thursday means thousands of Covid-19 testing sites in vulnerable U.S. areas will continue to operate into April." The program "primarily provides testing sites in areas with "moderate-to-high social vulnerability" according to an announcement from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services." More than 250 million Covid-19 tests "have been performed in the U.S. so far, Brett Giroir, the assistant secretary for health, said in a Thursday briefing."

HHS Working To Provide Alternative To Potentially Faulty COVID-19 Tests Used By Congress.

Politico (1/7, Lim, 6.73M) reports that the US Department of Health and Human Services "is working to provide alternative Covid testing for Congress after the Food and Drug Administration warned the test lawmakers have relied on is prone to false results, HHS testing czar Brett Giroir said Thursday." The FDA earlier this week "raised concern about the performance of a lab-based coronavirus test made by Curative and used by several major cities as well as Congress, saying it carries a 'risk of false results, particularly false negative results.'" The health agency "encouraged health providers to limit use of the test to people who have had Covid symptoms for 14 days or less."

Experts Weigh In On How US Can Jumpstart COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign.

NPR (1/8, Simmons-Duffin, Huang, 3.69M) reports the COVID-19 "vaccination campaign has gotten off to a sluggish start in the U.S." NPR says that "instead of 20 million people vaccinated by the end of 2020 -- a frequent promise of the Trump administration -- only around 6 million people have gotten their first dose so far." The outlet

"talked to more than a dozen public health experts to get their views" on how the US can "jump start the COVID-19 vaccination campaign," and lists "their takeaways." The piece adds that "in September, CDC Director Robert Redfield testified in Congress that 'the time is now' to get billions of dollars for coronavirus vaccine distribution out to states."

HHS Finalizes Rule Which Will Make It Easier For Religious Groups To Obtain Federal Grants.

Bloomberg Law (1/7, Stein, Subscription Publication, 4K) reports, "Religious groups will be able to more easily receive federal grant funds under a rule finalized by the Department of Health and Human Services Thursday." This "regulation is intended to reverse rulemaking by the Obama administration that prohibited recipients of grants for foster care programs from discriminating on the basis of age, disability, sex, race, color, national origin, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, or same-sex marital status."

Congressional Quarterly (1/7, Raman, Subscription Publication) reports HHS Chief of Staff Brian Harrison stated, "The HHS grants regulation furthers the Department's commitment to deregulation, protects the free exercise of religion, and relieves burdens on faith-based organizations seeking HHS support for their important work, especially as we seek to maximize opportunities for children to be adopted by loving families." The article says progressives are concerned "this will especially impact same-sex couples, as well as those of minority faiths, but conservative groups celebrated it as a win for protecting religious freedom."

CMS Administrator Says Agency Is Withdrawing Medicaid Fiscal Accountability Regulation.

Inside Health Policy (1/7, Stein, Subscription Publication) reports in a paywalled article that CMS Administrator Seema Verma on Thursday "announced the agency is withdrawing the Medicaid Fiscal Accountability Regulation, this time saying the 2020 year-end legislation that included supplemental pay transparency provisions would help achieve the proposed rule's goals."

National Front Page News

Headlines From Today's Front Pages.

Wall Street Journal:

After Capitol Riot, Resignations And Calls For Trump's Removal
'In A Dark Place': Before Condemning Violence, Trump Spent Day Increasingly Isolated And Angry
Some CEOs Fire Rioters, Call For President Trump's Removal From Office
Actions By Police Before Trump Supporters Attacked Capitol Backfired Spectacularly
Federal Investigators Probing AmEx Card Sales Practices
Boeing Reaches $2.5 Billion Settlement Of US Probe Into 737 MAX Crashes

New York Times:

Capitol Attack Leads Democrats To Demand That Trump Leave Office
These Are The Rioters Who Stormed The Nation's Capitol
Police Failures Spur Resignations And Complaints Of Double Standard

With Democrats In Control, Biden Moves To Advance Agenda
Republicans Splinter Over Whether To Make A Full Break From Trump

Washington Post:
Calls Intensify To Remove President From Office Calls Intensify To Remove Trump From Office
Biden Says Racial Bias Is Clear In Handling Of Hill Mob
Daily Covid Deaths Top 4,000 In US For First Time
How Police Were Overrun In Slew Of Failures
Senate Losses, Trump's Incitement Open Rifts In A Party Once In Thrall
At White House, A Retreat Into Rage Is Followed By Grudging Acceptance

Financial Times:
Democratic Leaders Call On Pence To Force Trump From Office
Activists Eye Targets In Weak And Vulnerable Corporate UK
Beijing Orders Chinese Media To Censor Coverage Of Alibaba Probe

Washington Times:
Republicans Rethink Trump Support Amid Capitol Siege Fallout, Administration Exodus
'An Emergency Of The Highest Magnitude': Dems, Some Republicans Push Immediate Trump Ouster
Trump's Options To Reverse Election Dissolve After Electoral College Certification
Capitol Police Face Shake-Up After Failure To Fend Off Mob Of Protesters
Republicans Rip Democrats' 'Double Standards' On Violence
Hunter Biden Owed Hundreds Of Thousands Of Dollars To IRS, Email Shows

Story Lineup From Last Night's Network News:
ABC: 25th Amendment; Capitol Siege-Pence; Capitol Siege; Capitol Siege-Security; Policing Double Standards; COVID Surge; Biden-Garland For AG; Clean Up Crews In Capitol.
CBS: Capitol Siege; 25th Amendment; Resignations; Policing Double Standards; Biden-Garland For AG; Capitol Siege-Security; Capitol Siege-Trump; Capitol Siege-Worldwide Reaction; COVID Surge; End Thoughts.
NBC: Resignations; 25th Amendment; 25th Amendment-Likelihood; Capitol Siege; Capitol Siege-Security; Policing Double Standards; Capitol Siege-America's Reaction; Capitol Siege-Worldwide Reaction; Capitol Siege-Causes; Capitol Siege-Extremists; COVID Surge; End Thoughts.

Network TV At A Glance:
Capitol Siege – 12 minutes, 45 seconds
25th Amendment – 10 minutes, 55 seconds
Capitol Siege-Security – 6 minutes, 50 seconds
Policing Double Standards – 4 minutes, 50 seconds
COVID Surge – 3 minutes, 30 seconds

Story Lineup From This Morning's Radio News Broadcasts:

ABC: Trump-Video; DeVos & Chao Resign; Capitol Police Chief Resigns; Schumer-Inaugural Security; Space Force-SpaceX Satellite Launch.
CBS: Trump-Video; Calls for Trump to Resign; Iauguration Fears; 25th Amendment; Rioters; Death at Capitol Siege; Trump-Social Media Ban.
FOX: DeVos & Chao Resign; Trump-Video; 25th Amendment.
NPR:

Last Laughs

Late Night Political Humor.

Jimmy Kimmel: "Last night was Trump's worst nightmare. The vice poodle is off the leash. I would hate to have been Mike Pence's juice box last night. The VP is PO-ed. One of his longtime pals in the Senate...said he's never seen Pence as mad as he was yesterday. They say Mike Pence hasn't been this angry since the night they picked 'Footloose' as the in-flight movie on Air Force Two."

Jimmy Kimmel: "Today we learned that Pence is even planning to go to Biden's inauguration. Of course he's planning to go to Biden's inauguration. It's one last chance to do what he does best: sit there and stare at the back of a President's head."

Jimmy Kimmel: "This rift between Pence and Trump, this is a tough one. ... Unless Pence visits Trump in prison, those two will never see each other again."

Jimmy Kimmel: "Mike Pence is headed back to Indiana to take a long hot shower in his swim trunks."

Jimmy Kimmel: "The resignations are piling up, transportation secretary and wife of Mitch McConnell, Elaine Chao, resigned. The deputy national security adviser resigned. The first lady's chief of staff. The White House social secretary. The deputy press secretary. Even slick Mick Mulvaney is calling it quits. They did not see this coming. They're 'Not-Sees.'"

Jimmy Kimmel: "Trump was suspended by Twitter, and blocked by Facebook and Instagram too. He's still on match.com."

Stephen Colbert: "You might recall that yesterday, the outgoing President incited an insurrection and unleashed an angry seditious mob that stormed the US Capitol in an attempt to stage a violent coup. To our worried friends and allies across the globe: rest assured, America knows we have a problem, and are seeking treatment."

Stephen Colbert: "But as worried as our friends and allies might be, you know who sounds more worried? The President. Because just a little while ago...he released a video that, curiously, contained none of the bravado of yesterday morning. ... Also, no apology or acceptance of personal responsibility. It definitely has the feel of someone that has been told by their lawyer, that in 13 days – or less – they can be charged with insurrection, sedition, and inciting violence. Maybe homicide. I don't know. I'm not a lawyer. I'm a clown. Like Rudy."

Stephen Colbert: "So, I'm not going to show you a word of it, because he doesn't mean a word of it. A man facing a noose will say anything to save his neck. Or save his skin. It's hard to tell. There's a lot of skin around that neck."

Stephen Colbert: "Over 100 lawmakers are calling for the President's removal. And today, Nancy Pelosi threatened to pursue impeachment if the President's Cabinet does not remove him using the 25th amendment. That is some serious 'one of us has to take away grandpa's car keys' energy."

Stephen Colbert: "In the President's video, he says there will be an orderly transition on January 20.' But he's not saying anything about what he's going to do before then. I'm guessing send a pallet of meth and machetes to every Bass Pro Shop in the country with a note saying 'Make me proud!'"

Stephen Colbert: "Aside from his fear of removal or prosecution, maybe baby just wants his toy back. Because Twitter locked the President's account after his riot on Capitol Hill. Good to know Twitter is finally treating a violence-inciting fascist as harshly as a teenager who used seven seconds of an Imagine Dragons song."

Stephen Colbert: "Overall, it was a tough day for the President's social media presence. He also got blocked from posting to Facebook and Instagram indefinitely. YouTube pulled his video address to the rioters, citing election misinformation, and Amazon banned him from ordering pixie sticks because they get him too wound up before bedtime."

Jimmy Fallon: "Well, guys, it's been a pretty epic 24 hours. Joe Biden was certified as our next President. Several staffers have resigned from the White House. Trump's social media accounts were banned. And yet, compared to yesterday, it's a slow news day."

Jimmy Fallon: "I'm still trying to process everything. Did anyone else have a tough time calming down last night? It wasn't easy falling asleep. I tried listening to my meditation app, but the guy leading the session was just chanting, '25th Amendment, 25th Amendment.'"

Jimmy Fallon: "Honestly, don't you just wish we could go back to the good old days where all we had to worry about was a global pandemic and murder hornets? 2021 feels like the end of a 'Scooby Doo' episode where we pull off its mask to reveal it's been 2020 all along."

Jimmy Fallon: "Things are so crazy, today, Mexico was like, 'If you need a wall around your Capitol, we'll pay for it.'"

Jimmy Fallon: "I think if there's anything to be learned from yesterday, it's that Merrick Garland can't have one fun day. I mean, first his Supreme Court nomination gets blocked, then he gets a new job and a riot happens. Seriously, what did this guy do in a previous life, kick over strollers?"

Jimmy Fallon: "That's right, Congress worked through the night and confirmed Biden's victory around 4:00 a.m. Yeah, we recognized the election of the world's most powerful person when cable channels were showing

infomercials. Pence was like, 'I hereby declare Joe Biden as the winner. And now stay tuned for an infomercial for Marie Osmond's Bodygym.'"

Jimmy Fallon: "Today, for the first time, President Trump finally acknowledged that there will be an 'orderly transition' of power on January 20. When Trump says there will be an 'orderly transition,' he means an orderly is gonna have to drag him out the front door."

Jimmy Fallon: "The President was banned from all of his social media accounts, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and even Snapchat. In other news, guess who doesn't want to ban TikTok anymore."

Jimmy Fallon: "I read that according to his closest allies, Trump is, quote, 'mentally unreachable,' while another source believes the President is 'out of his mind.' If any more news from 2016 breaks throughout the night, we'll be sure to keep you updated. How do you look at four years of Trump and just now are like, 'I'm starting to think this guy is nuts.'"

Jimmy Fallon: "Today, both Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi called for Pence to pursue the 25th Amendment and remove Trump from office. If that happened, we'd have three presidents in 13 days. I love the idea of changing presidents like movie Batmans."

Seth Meyers: "Well, yesterday we learned that if you insight a coup against the US government, you will face up to 12 hours without a Twitter account."

Seth Meyers: "That's right, a pro-Trump mob stormed the Capitol yesterday and forced the joint session of Congress to halt the certification of the electoral college vote. And if this is the first you're hearing of it, welcome Fox viewers."

Seth Meyers: "After inciting yesterday's assault on the US Capitol, President Trump released a statement early this morning pledging, quote, 'an orderly transition on January 20.' Oh, he pledged it, then, well, we're good. He never goes back on a pledge, just ask Marla, Ivana, or this bible."

James Corden: "Yesterday was a tough day for many of us, but once the chaos settled down, Congress immediately went back to work, and worked late into the night, officially certifying Joe Biden's victory at 3:30 in the morning. Making this the only good decision to ever happen at 3:30 in the morning."

James Corden: "3:30 a.m.! They debated the electoral votes, certified the election, and then just for fun, threw on 'Jurassic Park' and ordered a couple of pizzas. And Nancy Pelosi had all the ice cream. They all tucked into that."

James Corden: "Soon after the certification, President Trump released a statement, saying that there would be an 'orderly transition of power' on January 20. Unfortunately, the statement was wrapped around a brick and tossed through a Capitol building window."

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James Corden: "Trump also used the statement to mention that he disagreed with the outcome of the election. Well, thank God! Otherwise there would have been no way to know!"

James Corden: "You know what I love? All these people are going, 'These past 24 hours has really made me dislike Trump.'"

James Corden: "And after that ugly day yesterday, President Trump's mental state has now come into question, with one senior adviser saying Trump has 'lost it.' I've got to say, it's very brave of Republicans to start speaking out against Trump only 99.9 percent of the way through his term in office."

James Corden: "Not to quibble, but for someone to 'lose it,' first they must 'possess it,' mustn't they? You can't lose something you didn't possess. I love how we are talking about the President's state of mind the same way we are talking about losing car keys. 'I know the President's humanity is around here somewhere. It was there – I put it there. I have lost it, gone.'"

James Corden: "Meanwhile, Facebook and Twitter suspended the President's accounts. Twitter locked his account for 12 hours, and Facebook announced today that it would block Trump until at least the end of his term. So, you know what that means. Looks like Trump is finally about to start poppin' on TikTok, baby!"

James Corden: "Meanwhile, angry Republican leaders, as well as Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer, are now calling on the Vice President to invoke the 25th Amendment to remove Trump from office, because he's unable to execute his presidential duties. Well, yeah, of course Trump is unable to execute his presidential duties – they took away his Twitter!"

James Corden: "And yesterday's events seemed to be the final straw for many Trump associates. There have been multiple resignations yesterday and today. ... It makes sense, though. You want to get out into the job market before the Trump administration gets blocked on LinkedIn as well."

National News

Trump Says "A New Administration Will Be Inaugurated On January 20."

The AP (1/7, Lemire, Miller) reports, "With 13 days left in his term," President Trump "finally bent to reality Thursday amid growing talk of trying to force him out early, acknowledging he'll peacefully leave after Congress affirmed his defeat." In a video shared online, Trump "admitted his presidency would soon end – though he declined to mention President-elect Joe Biden by name or explicitly state he had lost." Trump said, "A new Administration will be inaugurated on January 20. My focus now turns to ensuring a smooth, orderly and seamless transition of power. This moment calls for healing and reconciliation." The AP says the video "appeared designed to stave off talk of a forced early eviction." USA Today (1/7, Fritze, Subramanian, 12.7M) also says the video "was the latest effort to get ahold of the fallout from the chaos that unfolded Wednesday when a mob attacked the Capitol and disrupted the counting of Electoral College votes."

The Washington Post (1/7, 10.52M) reports, "This was not a concession so much as a grudging acknowledgment that his presidency would end. Trump did not talk of winners and losers, nor did he utter the

word 'concede,' but it was the closest he seemed willing to go." The New York Times (1/7, Astor, 20.6M) reports Trump "came the closest he has so far to a concession statement" in the video. The Times says the video "was vital in the sense that Mr. Trump's ardent supporters will only accept his words, not anyone else's, and officials throughout government are concerned about unrest for the next 13 days around the country. But the president has a long history of recording such videos only to undermine his own remarks a short time later."

CNN (1/7, 89.21M) reports on its website, "Earlier Thursday, Trump issued a dark-of-night statement vowing an 'orderly transition,' which came about in part to stanch a wave of resignations from within the West Wing and the broader administration, according to a person familiar with the matter."

Democratic Leaders Call On Pence To Invoke 25th Amendment. David Muir said in the lead story on ABC World News Tonight (1/7, lead story, 5:35, 7.47M), "After one of the darkest days in US history, there are calls for the President to be removed. Some lawmakers are demanding impeachment of use of the 25th Amendment, and ABC News has learned tonight that even some Republicans and key members of the President's inner circle have discussed this – though with 13 days left of the Administration, it is very unclear if any of that will happen." Kristen Welker said on NBC Nightly News (1/7, story 2, 1:25, Holt, 5.91M) that "top Democrats tonight are...demanding he be removed from office now through the 25th Amendment." House Speaker Pelosi: "If the Vice President and Cabinet do not act, the Congress may be prepared to move forward with impeachment."

Nancy Cordes said on the CBS Evening News (1/7, story 2, 3:15, O'Donnell, 4.61M) that Democrats "have been highly critical of this President for four years now, but this is the first time they have formally called on his Cabinet to declare him unfit for office and to replace him with Vice President Mike Pence for the final two weeks of his term. ... Top Democrats went public with a dramatic plea today after failing to reach the Vice President by phone." Senate Minority Leader Schumer: "I believe the President is dangerous and should not hold office one day longer." Cordes: "So far, just one Republican...is publicly backing the move." Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-IL): "It's time to invoke the 25th Amendment and to end this nightmare."

The AP (1/7, Miller, Jalonick) reports, "Lawmakers of both parties raised the prospect Thursday of ousting [Trump] from office. ... Though Trump has less than two weeks in office, lawmakers and even some in his administration began discussing the issue Wednesday afternoon as Trump first refused to forcefully condemn the violent assault on the U.S. Capitol by a mob of his supporters, and then appeared to excuse it." Bloomberg (1/7, 3.57M) reports that Pelosi and Schumer "accused Trump of inciting the mob that stormed the Capitol and called him a continuing threat to democracy in his waning days in the White House." The San Francisco Chronicle (1/7, 2.44M) reports Pelosi "has put a second impeachment of President Trump on the table, but that doesn't mean it's likely that Democrats will oust him from office before Joe Biden becomes president."

Politico (1/7, Ferris, Zanona, Caygle, 6.73M) reports that Pelosi "said the 'best route' would be for Pence to initiate the action himself, which would involve the vice president and a majority of either the Cabinet, or another body 'established by law' – which could include Congress." CNBC (1/7, Tausche, 7.34M) reports on its website that Secretary of State Pompeo and Treasury Secretary Mnuchin "held informal conversations within their own agencies about the contours of the 25th Amendment, the invocation of which would begin a process to remove Trump from office, according to three sources familiar with the matter." However, the New York Times (1/7, Haberman, 20.6M) reports that "a person close to" Pence said the Vice President "is opposed to a call by Democrats in Congress and some Republicans to invoke the 25th Amendment."

The Washington Post (1/7, 10.52M) reports, "One administration official described Trump's behavior Wednesday as that of 'a total monster,' while another said the situation was 'insane' and 'beyond the pale.' ... A former senior administration official briefed on the talks confirmed that preliminary discussions of the 25th Amendment were underway, although this person cautioned that they were informal and that there was no indication of an immediate plan of action. Both of these people, like some others interviewed for this story, spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the matter."

CNBC (1/7, Pramuk, 7.34M) says on its website that "more than 100 lawmakers have called for the president's removal through the 25th Amendment, impeachment or resignation, according to an NBC News tally." Though Kinzinger is the only Republican among them, Politico (1/7, Ferris, Zanona, Caygle, 6.73M) reports that "privately, multiple Democratic members and aides insist that there is a larger group of Republicans beyond Kinzinger who support the move and are in discussions about how to proceed." The Chicago Tribune (1/7, Pearson, Donovan, 2.03M) quotes Kinzinger saying, "All indications are that the President has become unmoored, not just from his duty or even his oath but reality itself. It is for this reason that I call on the Vice President and members of the Cabinet to ensure the next few weeks are safe for the American people and that we have a sane captain of the ship."

The Arizona Republic (1/7, 1.05M) reports Sen. Mark Kelly (D-AZ) said in a statement that Trump "violated his oath of office and Kelly is open to considering removal from office after the rioting Wednesday at the Capitol that many blame on Trump." Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) "had no comment on the growing calls from the Democratic Party, her spokeswoman said." The Philadelphia Inquirer (1/7, Seidman, Tamari) reports Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA) "urged Pence to invoke the [25th] amendment...call[ing] it 'the quickest way to protect our domestic and national security.'"

The Detroit Free Press (1/7, 2.16M) reports that "every Democrat in Congress from Michigan" backs Trump's removal, and the Denver Post (1/7, 660K) reports that "all six Democratic members of Congress from Colorado said Thursday that the president should be removed from office." The Cleveland Plain Dealer (1/7, 1.22M) reports the only Democratic member of Ohio's delegation who has not publicly backed removal is Rep. Marcia Fudge (D-OH), who has been nominated for HUD secretary. The Miami Herald (1/7, 647K) reports, "South Florida's Democratic representatives in Congress [also] joined a growing number of their colleagues Thursday in calling for" Trump to be removed. The Dallas Morning News (1/7, 772K) reports "at least five Texas Democratic lawmakers" are urging Pence to invoke the 25th Amendment.

Axios (1/7, Talev, 1.26M) reports, "Eight in 10 Republicans oppose removing President Trump from office for inciting his supporters to storm Congress in an effort to overturn his election loss, according to a new Ipsos poll for Axios. ... The stark finding underscores the degree to which the Republican Party has become the party of Trump" and "helps to explain GOP leaders' resistance to impeachment or invoking the 25th Amendment." Politico (1/7, Ferris, Zanona, Caygle, 6.73M), Roll Call (1/7, McPherson, 130K), and Breitbart (1/7, 1.26M) are among the other sources covering the calls for the use of the 25th Amendment.

USA Today (1/7, 12.7M) editorializes, "Invoking the 25th...is neither easy nor ideal. It requires the vice president and a majority of the Cabinet to certify that the president is unable to discharge his duties. ... Nevertheless, the question is one of relative risks, and leaving an unpunished Trump in office is the greater threat. Trump appears mentally incapacitated – living in a fantasy world of voting fraud, unable to accept being labeled a loser, checking out of his job even as thousands of Americans are dying every day from the raging coronavirus."

The New York Times (1/7, 20.6M) editorializes, "Trump is still the president, even if not for long. The potential for him to wreak additional havoc is enormous. Just ask the 10 former secretaries of defense who felt moved to issue a statement this week warning the president not to drag the military into his election dispute. ... In less than two weeks, America will officially scrape the mud of the Trump presidency from its shoe. But the president and his supporters have shown themselves willing to burn down the house on his way out. Preventing this should be the chief focus of the nation's leaders."

The Washington Post (1/7, 10.52M) editorializes, "Trump's imminent departure will not undo the damage to our democracy that culminated with Wednesday's violent assault on the Capitol." Joe Biden has "consistently has vowed to serve all Americans, not just those who voted for him. That will be a welcome change, but healing the divisions of the past four years will be a long-term, difficult process."

WSJournal Says Trump Should Resign. The Wall Street Journal (1/7, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says in an editorial that Trump should resign rather than face a second impeachment in his last days in office, but concedes that such a move by Trump is unlikely. The New York Times (1/7, Grynbaum, 20.6M), reporting on the editorial, says "the American flagship of Rupert Murdoch's newspaper empire denounced" Trump and encouraged him to resign, in a "striking repudiation of the president from a news outlet controlled by Mr. Murdoch, whose Fox News cable network is home to several of Mr. Trump's most loyal and longstanding media defenders."

Trump Awards Medal Of Freedom To Player, Sorenstam, Zaharias.

The AP (1/7) reports the White House announced Thursday that "Hall of Fame golfers Annika Sorenstam and Gary Player, along with the late Olympian Babe Didrikson Zaharias, have been presented with the Presidential Medal of Freedom" in a ceremony Thursday that was closed to the media. White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany "released a statement on the awards, which for Sorenstam and Player had been previously announced last March. ... The posthumous honor for Zaharias was announced Thursday."

On its website, Fox News (1/7, Gaydos, 23.99M) says the closed-door ceremony was held "a day after a violent mob stormed the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to thwart the certification of the 2020 presidential election results and leaving a wake of destruction in its path." Likewise, the Washington Post (1/7, Hill, 10.52M) says the ceremony came "less than 24 hours after pro-Trump insurrectionists stormed the U.S. Capitol building and stalled congressional efforts to certify electoral college votes" for Joe Biden.

Labor Department Suspends Trump's Order Banning Diversity Training.

USA Today (1/7, Guynn, 12.7M) reports the Labor Department has suspended President Trump's "executive order restricting diversity training by government agencies and contractors." A guidance from the department said the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs will stop investigating agencies or contractors suspected of violating the order and will not take any enforcement action. Critics said Trump's order "was a broadside against diversity and inclusion programs seeking to reverse patterns of discrimination and exclusion going back decades." USA Today adds that Joe Biden's Administration "is widely expected to scrap it."

Calls Grow For Rep. Miller To Resign After Speech Quoting Hitler.

The AP (1/7, Tareen) reports a "growing number of Democrats" are calling on newly sworn-in Rep. Mary Miller (R-IL) to resign after she "quoted Adolf Hitler at a rally outside the U.S. Capitol this week." At a rally hosted by

the group Moms for America, Miller was "discussing the need to appeal to young people" and said, "Hitler was right on one thing. He said, 'Whoever has the youth has the future.'" Reps. Marie Newman (D-IL) and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), "along with a contingent of state legislators circulating a petition, demanded Miller step down immediately." The Chicago Tribune (1/7, Donovan, Petrella, 2.03M) says Miller's remarks "were rebuked by Republicans and Democrats on social media Wednesday."

Loeffler Concedes To Warnock.

The AP (1/7, Nadler) reports Sen. Kelly Loeffler (R-GA) conceded to Democrat Raphael Warnock on Thursday. Loeffler "posted a video to social media Thursday evening saying that she had called Warnock to congratulate him." Loeffler said in the video, "Unfortunately we came up slightly short in the runoff election. ... Earlier today I called Rev. Warnock to congratulate him and to wish him well in serving this great state."

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (1/7, Bluestein, 1.46M) quotes Loeffler as saying in the video, "Rest assured: The fight to advance the American dream is far from over. ... The fight to protect conservative values is far from over. And the fight against socialism and the radical agenda of the left is very far from over. I fully intend to stay in this fight for freedom, for our values, and for the future of this great country."

NYTimes Analysis: Warnock, Ossoff Victories Will "Shift The Policy Agenda" After Biden's Inauguration. A New York Times (1/7, Hulse, 20.6M) analysis says the "stunning wins" by Warnock and Jon Ossoff "upended Washington's power structure overnight, providing an unexpected opening to the incoming Biden administration by handing unified control of Congress to Democrats, who will be tested by governing with spare majorities." Their victories mean that Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY) "will control the Senate floor rather than" Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY), and in what the Times describes as "a wholesale change that will shift the policy agenda after [Joe] Biden's inauguration, liberals...will head Senate panels, rather than conservatives. Legislation from the Democratic-controlled House that had languished in the Senate will now get consideration across the Rotunda."

In a separate story the New York Times (1/7, Tankersley, Shear, 20.6M) says Biden "is expected to move quickly to gain passage of $2,000 stimulus checks – which were a big focus in the Georgia elections – along with expanded unemployment benefits, aid to state and local governments and additional relief for small businesses." But, "the scope of his ambitions will be somewhat constrained by the moderates in his party, as well as a much thinner majority than his party's predecessor, President Barack Obama, had."

Biden Taps Walsh For Labor, Raimondo For Commerce.

The AP (1/7, Madhani) reports that Joe Biden has selected Boston Mayor Marty Walsh (D), "a former union worker who shares Biden's Irish-American background and working-class roots," for labor secretary; Rhode Island Gov. Gina Raimondo (D) for commerce secretary; and Isabel Guzman, "a California small-business advocate, to lead the Small Business Administration." The AP says Walsh's "nomination was praised by union leaders Thursday." AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka "said Walsh...understands that collective bargaining will combat inequality, beat COVID-19 and expand opportunities for immigrants, women and people of all backgrounds." The New York Times (1/7, Swanson, Scheiber, Cowley, 20.6M) says the roles are "not as high profile as some other cabinet positions," but "wield enormous power given their roles overseeing everything from workplace safety to the protection of American industry."

The Washington Post (1/7, 10.52M) reports that "in pairing the two Cabinet picks, Biden balanced Raimondo, who has often been at odds with major labor unions, with Walsh, who enjoys strong support from leaders of the AFL-CIO and earned his union card in 1988 when he joined Laborers Local 223." The Post says Raimondo "will have a voice in the administration's 'Buy America' efforts...and she also will probably need to mollify corporate interests worried by Biden's promise to give organized labor and environmental groups a greater say in trade policy." Biden also nominated Don Graves, "who advised him on economic issues during his tenure as vice president and later served at the Treasury Department, as deputy commerce secretary."

The Wall Street Journal (1/7, Restuccia, Collins, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that unions previously expressed concerns over Raimondo's potential nomination to a Cabinet seat after she oversaw a pension restructuring in the state that raised tensions with local groups, though the Rhode Island AFL-CIO president endorsed her nomination. Guzman's nomination is also expected to please the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, which has called for representation on Biden's Cabinet.

Politico (1/7, Mueller, Pager, 6.73M) says Walsh "beat out a host of other names floated for the position," including Rep. Andy Levin (D-MI), former Deputy Labor Secretary Seth Harris, California Labor Secretary Julie Su, and AFL-CIO Chief Economist Bill Spriggs. The Boston Globe (1/7, McDonald, Ebbert, 1.04M) reports that Walsh's nomination received praise from unions, "but some conservatives immediately criticized the pick." Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC) said, "Marty Walsh's background in organized labor signals that he will work to deliver on left-wing campaign promises."

Politico (1/7, Pager, Palmer, Bade, 6.73M) says Raimondo is "a former venture capitalist who worked at a fund backed by Bain Capital," and "during the presidential primary, she threw her support behind former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, serving as national co-chair for the well funded but ill-fated campaign." Bloomberg (1/7, 3.57M) reports that "progressives have raised concerns about Raimondo's record in business and in state government." According to Bloomberg, in 2011, Raimondo "led an effort that cut pensions over the opposition of unions." Roll Call (1/7, Macagnone, 130K) reports progressive group Demand Progress "called Raimondo the wrong pick for the job" on Thursday, claiming she "has a long history of prioritizing the needs of Wall Street above those of working Rhode Islanders."

Biden Tells AG Pick Garland: "You Don't Work For Me." ABC World News Tonight (1/7, story 7, 0:20, Muir, 7.47M) reported that Biden introduced "his nominee for attorney general, calling Judge Merrick Garland, quote, 'a man of impeccable integrity.'" Biden "said [Garland] would be the people's lawyer, whose loyalty would not be to the President, but to the Constitution and the nation." Garland "had been former President Obama's pick for the Supreme Court. Republicans had refused to consider him."

On the CBS Evening News (1/7, story 5, 0:40, O'Donnell, 4.61M), Ed O'Keefe reported Biden "named his pick for attorney general, federal judge Merrick Garland, and gave him clear instructions." Biden said, "You are not the President or the Vice President's lawyer. Your loyalty is not to me. It's to the law, the Constitution, the people of this nation, to guarantee justice." Garland "said he's honored and eager to lead a department reeling after four years of interference by President Trump."

Reuters (1/7) reports that on Thursday, Joe Biden introduced his picks to lead the Justice Department, "including federal appeals court Judge Merrick Garland to serve as the top law enforcement officer, and vowed to restore faith in the rule of nation's law." Biden also confirmed he has chosen "Lisa Monaco for deputy attorney general, Vanita Gupta for associate attorney general and Kristen Clarke for assistant attorney general for the department's Civil Rights Division." Reuters reports that in a statement, "Biden's transition team said the

nominees reflected his 'deeply held commitment to reaffirming the Department of Justice as a pillar of independence and integrity, and ensuring that the Attorney General and his senior leadership team are the American people's lawyers – not the president's law firm.'"

The AP (1/7, Tucker, Balsamo) says that in Garland, Biden is "turning to an experienced judge to help de-politicize the Justice Department and restore the rule of law after what he described as four years of lawlessness under President Donald Trump." The AP adds, "If confirmed by the Senate, which is likely," Garland "would inherit immediate challenges related to civil rights, an ongoing criminal tax investigation into Biden's son Hunter and calls from many Democrats to pursue criminal inquiries into Trump after he leaves office." According to the AP, Biden "vowed that Garland's loyalty would rest not with the president, but with the law and Constitution. 'You don't work for me,' Biden charged as he introduced Garland."

The Washington Post (1/7, 10.52M) says "some Democrats were surprised to see Biden nominate...Garland, a White man, to the top law enforcement position in the nation at a time of racial reckoning. But Biden touted Garland as a beacon of judicial independence and pointed to his work in the Justice Department under Democratic and Republican presidents."

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From: Stephane Bancel b6
Sent: 7/10/2020 6:56:25 AM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=410e1ca313f44ced9938e50d2ff0b6c2-collinsf]
CC: Wholley, David (FNIH) [T] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=cd9e702fcf28414883d0b6996d677257-wholleyd]; Nadege Ripley b6
Subject: Re: Invitation to join ACTIV Leadership Team

Dear Francis,

It was good to touch base, thank you for the initiate to make yesterday zoom meeting happen.

I would be honored to be part of the calls/zooms and contribute. Nadege will contact David.

b4,b5

This is at a great risk for the company, but none of us could contemplate a world where we could have a vaccine approved in a few months, and not enough supply of vaccines. We are very pleased with the early clinical data and believe the vaccine should provide protection above the 50% threshold set by FDA.

Never hesitate to contact me in case I can do anything to help. We care deeply about using our technology to help as many people as we can. In case you need me urgently, my mobile is b6 for calls and/or text messages.

Warmest Regards,

Stephane

From: "Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]" b6
Date: Friday, July 10, 2020 at 4:17 AM
To: Stephane Bancel b6
Cc: "Wholley, David (FNIH) [T]" b6
Subject: Invitation to join ACTIV Leadership Team

Dear Stephane,

That was an excellent call this morning about vaccine trial recruitment, and I've invited Stephen Hoge to join a follow up call with NIH leadership tomorrow afternoon.

I'm writing on a related matter – the ACTIV public-private partnership. We have lots of activity across our ACTIV working groups moving at rapid speed, and you have had representation on the Vaccines Working Group. ACTIV also has a leadership team that meets once a month to discuss progress and we typically invite the CEO's of the biotech companies to join. It would be great to have you join future leadership meetings to represent Moderna.

Please let me know if you would be able to join our leadership team and David Wholley, cc'd who manages the ACTIV partnership will ensure you receive the meeting invite for our next meeting scheduled for Wednesday, July 29, 2:30-4:00pm.

Thanks,
Francis

Francis Collins M.D., Ph.D.
NIH Director

Please consider the environment before printing this email

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From: Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=D06F5C7AAD094F6685D9F1D260D46441-PEREZSTABLE]
Sent: 7/10/2020 4:13:03 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=410e1ca313f44ced9938e50d2ff0b6c2-collinsf]
CC: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=549f390b39d044a8b5d1e0e1a8f76c1f-woodgs]; McManus, Ayanna (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=bcf06de08ba845249b9b36ad216e237e-amcmanus]
Subject: Re: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM
Attachments: Moderna_Meeting_clean.pptx

Hello Francis, I am attaching two slides that I would show. Thanks, Eliseo

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From: Francis Collins < b6 >
Date: Thursday, July 9, 2020 at 10:05 PM
To: "Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E]" b6 "Austin, Christopher (NIH/NCATS) [E]" b6 , "Schwetz, Tara (NIH/OD) [E]" < b6 Eliseo Perez Stable b6 Corey MD, Larry" b6 "Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" b6 'Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E]" b6 "Denny, Joshua (NIH/OD) [E]" b6 "Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]" b6 , "Parker, Ashley (NIH/OD) [E]" b6 Nelson Michael b6 , "Anderson, James (NIH/OD) [E]" b6 "Clayton, Janine (NIH/OD) [E]" b6 "Wilson, Dave (NIH/OD) [E]" b6 , Anthony Fauci < b6 >
Cc: "Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E]" b6 "McManus, Ayanna (NIH/OD) [E]" b6
Subject: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM

Dear Colleagues,

Last Saturday (yes, that was July 4, sorry) we gathered to talk about ways to enhance recruitment of volunteers for the Phase 3 vaccine trials – to be sure that maximum efforts are being made to include groups at highest risk. That would include older individuals, people with chronic illnesses, African-Americans, Latinx, and Native Americans. I sent a note the next day that summarized the plans we developed (attached here for reference).

Larry Corey made available the list of recruitment sites contemplated for the Moderna trial, and some of you have been doing cross referencing to see what kind of connection there might be with NIH programs that already include community outreach efforts. Attached is a table that Chris Austin and his team put together, seeking to capture CTSAs, PETAL sites, and RCMIs that are near those potential sites. The definitions used to generate the table are shown below.

Meanwhile the COVPN was announced, and included a web site for volunteers to sign up and register their interest in possibly being contacted for participation. In just 24 yours, there were more than 30,000 sign-ups (including me and a few of you, I gather).

Today I organized a call with Tony Fauci, John Mascola, Moncef Slaoui, Stephane Bancel (CEO, Moderna) and Stephen Hoge (President, Moderna). We had a really good discussion about the importance of diversity in the vaccine trial recruitment. Stephen presented some of their existing plans through their BARDA-funded CRO (PPD) that is organizing about 2/3 of the sites (the other 1/3 is from NIAID). He made it clear that from his perspective that this diversity of volunteers is both scientifically and socially essential. Each of the CRO sites has been asked to describe their outreach efforts, and will not be activated unless those are satisfactory. Stephen's goal is to at least achieve representation that

matches the US population, but he aims to go higher than that because of how COVID has hit certain populations with particular harshness. This all sounded encouraging. But I think we might be able to make this even better.

You should have a Zoom invite on your calendar for 5 PM tomorrow. I have invited Stephen Hoge and his associate Melanie Ivarsson to join the call, and to make a ten minute presentation about their current plans. After that, I would like to have 5 minute presentations from Chris Austin (CTSAs), Eliseo Perez-Stable (NIMHD), Gary Gibbons (NHLBI), and Josh Denny (All of Us). If you really want to show slides, I'll need to get them from you by noon so they can be assembled in to one slide deck for sharing screen. The goal of the meeting is to figure out how to maximize the synergy between our existing resources and trial recruitment. We will be talking specifically about the Moderna trial this time, but keep in mind that other trials (each aiming to recruit 30,000 participants) will be not far behind – as will therapeutic trials for inpatients and outpatients in the same geographic areas.

Thanks for your willingness to pitch in here – it really matters.

Best, Francis

Definitions/Add'l Context/Source Data

1. **CTSA Program Sites**
    a. "NCATS CTSA Hub Exact Location Match" are institutions located within the same county as the proposed CT site.
    b. "NCATS CTSA Hub Vicinity Match" are institutions located within ~1.5 hours driving distance from the proposed CT site.
    c. Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) are geographical standards developed by NIST. First two numbers are the state and following 3 numbers are county-level identifiers.

2. **PETAL Sites**
    a. Used the survey data from the ACTIV CTC WG and the PETAL roster from the Network PO from NHLBI a few weeks ago.

3. **RCMI Sites**
    a. Public list (updated August 2019): https://www.nimhd.nih.gov/docs/rcmi_082619.pdf

4. **Grayed out rows**
    a. These locations do not have a CTSA, PETAL or RCMI site near them at all. They range from being quite a distance away from a site of the 3 funded networks (e.g. the grayed out TN ones) to very rural areas (e.g. the grayed out TX ones).

From: Austin, Christopher (NIH/NCATS) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=17597CABC42247548E596778304F781F-AUSTINC]
Sent: 7/10/2020 8:47:42 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=410e1ca313f44ced9938e50d2ff0b6c2-collinsf]
Subject: RE: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM

Yes sure

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Friday, July 10, 2020 4:47 PM
To: Austin, Christopher (NIH/NCATS) [E] b6
Subject: RE: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM

Are you OK with my sharing this with Stephen Hoge of Moderna?

From: Austin, Christopher (NIH/NCATS) [E] b6
Sent: Friday, July 10, 2020 8:34 AM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Schwetz, Tara (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 b6; Corey MD, Larry b6 ibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 Denny, Joshua (NIH/OD) [E] Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6 Parker, Ashley (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Nelson Michael b6 Anderson, James (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Clayton, Janine (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Wilson, Dave (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] b6 McManus, Ayanna (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: RE: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM

All – updated version of the mapping spreadsheet is enclosed, in which the NIMHD data were cross-checked with data Eliseo sent us from NIMHD's analysis of their sites, and NIMHD specific projects also added. Chris

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From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Thursday, July 9, 2020 10:05 PM
To: Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Austin, Christopher (NIH/NCATS) [E] <austinc@mail.nih.gov>; Schwetz, Tara (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 Corey MD, Larry b6; Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 Denny, Joshua (NIH/OD) [E] Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] <jmascola@mail.nih.gov>; Parker, Ashley (NIH/OD) [E] Nelson Michael b6 Anderson, James (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Clayton, Janine (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Wilson, Dave (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
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Thanks for your willingness to pitch in here – it really matters.

Best, Francis

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a. These locations do not have a CTSA, PETAL or RCMI site near them at all. They range from being quite a distance away from a site of the 3 funded networks (e.g. the grayed out TN ones) to very rural areas (e.g. the grayed out TX ones).

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=410E1CA313F44CED9938E50D2FF0B6C2-COLLINSF]
Sent: 7/10/2020 2:12:43 AM
To: Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=02e22836b5ff4e9988e3770cfc7ee770-tabakl]
Subject: RE: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM

Yes

From: Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]
Sent: Thursday, July 9, 2020 10:10 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]
Subject: Re: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM

I had to privately encourage him to speak during the meeting on racism – sometimes it is hard for him to find his voice. I will reach out to him. Can I indicate that you wanted him to speak for a few minutes if he can join?

From: Francis Collins [b6]
Date: Thursday, July 9, 2020 at 10:09 PM
To: "Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E]" [b6]
Subject: RE: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM

Agree. So far he hasn't confirmed whether he can join the call.

From: Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]
Sent: Thursday, July 9, 2020 10:08 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]
Subject: Re: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM

Francis,
There might be value allowing [b5]
Larry

From: Francis Collins [b6]
Date: Thursday, July 9, 2020 at 10:05 PM
To: "Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E]" [b6] "Austin, Christopher (NIH/NCATS) [E]" [b6] "Schwetz, Tara (NIH/OD) [E]" [b6] "Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E]" [b6], "Corey MD, Larry" [b6], "Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" [b6] "Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E]" [b6] "Denny, Joshua (NIH/OD) [E]" <joshua.denny@nih.gov>, "Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]" [b6] "Parker, Ashley (NIH/OD) [E]" [b6] Nelson Michael [b6] "Anderson, James (NIH/OD) [E]" [b6] "Clayton, Janine (NIH/OD) [E]" [b6], "Wilson, Dave (NIH/OD) [E]" [b6], Anthony Fauci [b6]
Cc: "Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E]" [b6], "McManus, Ayanna (NIH/OD) [E]" [b6]
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Dear Colleagues,

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Best, Francis

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Sent: 7/10/2020 11:53:19 AM
To: Wilson, Dave (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=7525ed7759204341b78f96076898c011-wilsondr]
Subject: RE: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM

Great, thanks!

From: Wilson, Dave (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]
Sent: Friday, July 10, 2020 7:41 AM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]
Subject: RE: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM

Good morning Francis,

I will definitely be on this call.

Dave

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]
Sent: Thursday, July 9, 2020 10:05 PM
To: Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]; Austin, Christopher (NIH/NCATS) [E] [b6]; Schwetz, Tara (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] [b6]; Corey MD, Larry [b6]; Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] [b6]; Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] [b6]; Denny, Joshua (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] [b6]; Parker, Ashley (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]; Nelson Michael [b6]; Anderson, James (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]; Clayton, Janine (NIH/OD) [b6]; Wilson, Dave (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] [b6]
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Sent: 8/5/2020 1:47:16 PM
To: McManus, Ayanna (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=bcf06de08ba845249b9b36ad216e237e-amcmanus]; Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=549f390b39d044a8b5d1e0e1a8f76c1f-woodgs]
Subject: FW: quick question about vaccine trial coordination

Note I've let Rebecca know I can't do our catch up at that time.

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]
Sent: Wednesday, August 5, 2020 9:45 AM
To: Slaoui, Moncef b6
Subject: RE: quick question about vaccine trial coordination

I'll call you at 11:45

From: Slaoui, Moncef b6
Sent: Wednesday, August 5, 2020 9:11 AM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: Re: quick question about vaccine trial coordination

Francis
I have an external board meeting that I chair and I can't change or miss it
I can talk at 11:45 or 11:50
If you can

Moncef
Tel: b6

> On Aug 5, 2020, at 9:09 AM, Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 wrote:
>
> Would you be free for a call at noon today?
>
> ---
>
> **From:** Slaoui, Moncef b6
> **Sent:** Tuesday, August 4, 2020 8:36 PM
> **To:** Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
> **Subject:** Re: quick question about vaccine trial coordination
>
> Hi Francis
> Thanks for your note and question
> There is of course no reason to object to this and b5
> b5
> Maybe we could have a Quick call tomorrow to share more before a decision is made
> Let me know
> All the best

Moncef
Tel: b6

On Aug 4, 2020, at 8:17 PM, Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 wrote:

Hi Moncef,

I have had a couple of conversations with Mikael Dolsten about ways to be sure that we learn everything possible about the path to success for COVID-19 vaccine trials, b5 b5 b5 Mikael is amenable to a meeting every two weeks to compare notes – initially between the Moderna and Pfizer trials, but potentially others as they get underway. b5

I have two questions for you: 1) b5 2) b5 b5

b5

Best, Francis

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=410E1CA313F44CED9938E50D2FF0B6C2-COLLINSF]
Sent: 9/10/2020 4:55:49 PM
To: Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=b71b953b50a5495ca0f2869ab13bc407-gibbonsgh]; Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=284d85649e634a0a91bb0b9aac84846c-mensahga]
CC: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=7f78b40a596b4ca4a2850a429d1ae3f2-jmascola]; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=df38103d75134f658ae2d356f0396b94-afauci]; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=02e22836b5ff4e9988e3770cfc7ee770-tabakl]; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=d06f5c7aad094f6685d9f1d260d46441-perezstable] b6 Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=2d7e368a3137473bbce161547a82f2de-clane]; Nelson Michael [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=7c3323ab6a02468689fa2c51a87c43cc-NelsonMicha]; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=059e53e386aa42fea27c7e17a4cc3cd7-johnslen]; Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=b6d6c0a2a0304ca184b0c719bab8d080-hoopermw]
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Understood. This is all unprecedented. I know everyone is working really hard. I'm sorry if I sound pushy! If I can help by making calls to PIs or their institutions, just let me know.

Francis

From: Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6
Sent: Thursday, September 10, 2020 8:28 AM
To: Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Cc: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6
b6 b6 Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Nelson Michael
b6 Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Hooper, Monica
(NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Dear Francis and Colleagues,

Please be assured that everyone understands the sense of urgency with this situation and wants this program deployed ASAP.

Our staff is working flat out 24/7 on this b5

b5

b5

Similarly, it should also be recognized that these PIs only submitted proposals for review *2 weeks ago* b5

b5

I actually believe that our team and these PIs are rising to the challenge and making good progress on a very daunting task under very challenging circumstances.

We appreciate your ongoing understanding and recognize that this public health crisis is testing the patience of all of us. We are committed to working diligently alongside all of you as we all do our very best in service to these underserved communities.

Best regards

Gary

From: Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6
Sent: Thursday, September 10, 2020 7:21 AM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Cc: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6; Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 b6; Corey MD, Larry b6; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Nelson Michael b6 Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6; Kathleen Neuzil b6 Marovich, Mary (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Merlin Robb b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Dr. Collins,

Yes. We will update Gary and Eliseo so that they can update you at your meeting on Saturday.
Our CEAL working group will be on stand-by.

Thanks.

-George Mensah

George A. Mensah, MD, FACC, FAHA
Director, Center for Translation Research & Implementation Science
NHLBI | NIH | Bethesda | Maryland | 20892
(P) b6 | (F) 301.402.1051 b6
Twitter.com/NHLBI_Translate

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Thursday, September 10, 2020 7:15 AM
To: Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6

Cc: Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 ; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 ; Corey MD, Larry b6 ; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 ; Nelson Michael b6 ; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 ; Kathleen Neuzil b6 ; Marovich, Mary (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Merlin Robb b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

I'm glad to know of this progress. By Saturday's 10 AM call, will it be possible b4,b5 b4,b5 b4,b5 That's what we need right now.

Francis

From: Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6
Sent: Thursday, September 10, 2020 5:55 AM
To: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6
Cc: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 ; Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 ; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 ; Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 ; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6 ; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 Corey MD, Larry b6 Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 ; Nelson Michael b6 ; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 ; Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 ; Kathleen Neuzil b6 Marovich, Mary (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Merlin Robb b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Dear John,

Thanks for sharing this with us. We are pleased to see the momentum in the right direction.
We also agree with you that there is more work to be done.

I wanted to share with you that:

b5

We will keep you posted.
Again, many thanks for the support.

-George Mensah

George A. Mensah, MD, FACC, FAHA
Director, Center for Translation Research & Implementation Science
National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute | National Institutes of Health
6705 Rockledge Drive | Suite 6070 | Bethesda | Maryland | 20892
(P) b6 | (F) 301.402.1051 b6

twitter.com/NHLBI_Translate

From: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6
Sent: Wednesday, September 9, 2020 8:51 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
Cc: Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6; Corey MD, Larry b6; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Nelson Michael b6; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6; Kathleen Neuzil b6; Marovich, Mary (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Merlin Robb b6
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All,

We had productive weekly OWS leadership call with Moderna today – b4,b5

b4,b5

b4,b5

Greatly appreciate the efforts of all involved – I think we will make real progress. This would not be possible without this concerted all NIH effort.

Best,
John

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Sunday, September 6, 2020 4:09 PM
To: Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
Cc: Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6; Corey MD, Larry b6; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Nelson Michael b6; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6; Kathleen Neuzil b6; Marovich, Mary (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Merlin Robb b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Excellent indeed!

From: Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6
Sent: Sunday, September 6, 2020 2:43 PM
To: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6; Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
Cc: Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E]

b6; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6; Corey MD, Larry b6 Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Nelson Michael b6 Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 Kathleen Neuzil b6 Marovich, Mary (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Merlin Robb b6
Subject: Re: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Excellent! This is very helpful confirmation/validation of what we heard and took away. I think we are all aligned as you outlined Francis.

b5

This alignment validation within NIH is helpful as we prepare to meet with Mel and Stephen today at 4 ; and take a deeper dice to get increasingly more granular and concrete on action steps.

Will keep you posted as things progress.

Best

Gary

From: "Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]" b6
Date: Sunday, September 6, 2020 at 2:24:32 PM
To: "Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]" b6 "Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" b6 "Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E]" b6
Cc: "Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E]" b6 "Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E]" b6, "Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E]" b6, "Corey MD, Larry" b6 "Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E]" b6, "Nelson Michael" b6, "Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" b6, "Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" b6, "Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E]" b6 "Kathleen Neuzil" b6, "Marovich, Mary (NIH/NIAID) [E]" b6, "Merlin Robb" b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Francis, Gary,

Yes, as noted immediately below. b5 b5

b5

b5 – but this is easy to establish.

John

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Sunday, September 6, 2020 1:54 PM
To: Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
Cc: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6; Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6; Corey MD, Larry b6; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Nelson Michael b6; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

HI Gary,

Thanks for this summary. b5

b5

What I think needs to happen urgently is a deep dive with CEAL b5

b5

If I'm wrong, and you and others on this e-mail think we need another pow-wow before proceeding to the two steps above, please say so – but otherwise, let's proceed to dig in with Moderna ASAP. I'm glad to take part in any of those conversations where my presence would be useful, but I don't want to be rate-limiting.

Francis

From: Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6
Sent: Sunday, September 6, 2020 12:46 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
Cc: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6; Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6; Corey MD, Larry b6; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Nelson Michael b6; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6
Subject: Re: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the CEAL leadership team, we appreciated the opportunity to participate in Saturday's call with Moderna and our colleagues at OWS and HHS.

In response to Francis' charge/tasking — b5

b5

We obviously defer to the NIAID team as experts in conducting vaccine trials and appreciate your longstanding recognition of the importance of effective community engagement as a best practice for enhancing the recruitment of minority groups into clinical trials.

b5

Best

Gary

From: "Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]" <b6
Date: Thursday, September 3, 2020 at 8:42:37 PM
To: "Melanie Ivarsson" <b6
Cc: "Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]" <b6 "Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E]" <b6>, "Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E]" <b6, "Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E]" <b6>, "Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" <b6, "Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E]" <b6, "Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH)" <b6>, "Stephen Hoge" <b6>, "Stephane Bancel" <b6, "Corey MD, Larry" <b6, "Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E]" <b6 "Slaoui, Moncef" <b6 "Nelson Michael" <b6>, "Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" <b6 "Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" <b6, "Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E]" <b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Hi Mel,

Yes, Julie has reached out and confirmed the conclusions that you outline below. Many thanks for going through this additional analysis step. So now that this is agreed, let's pull all of the resources together ASAP and figure out how to mount a serious surge for African American recruitment in those 20 sites. I'm looping in Larry Corey and Nelson Michael since several of these sites are COVPN. Also re-adding Moncef Slaoui, Cliff Lane, Lenora Johnson, George Mensah, and Monica Hooper to the thread.

Zoom call for some of us is set up again for Saturday 10 am EDT.

Thanks, Francis

From: Melanie Ivarsson <b6
Sent: Thursday, September 3, 2020 5:48 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] <b6
Cc: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] <b6; Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] <b6>; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] <b6 Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] <b6 Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] <b6; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] <b6; Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) <b6 Stephen Hoge <b6; Stephane Bancel <b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Dear Francis

Julie and I met this evening to go through the geographies we have selected for inclusion for focused outreach. It was very helpful to hear about the diligent and thoughtful analysis she has done on this and we really appreciate this.

b4,b5

b4,b5 I believe that she is going to reach out to you directly on this.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any further questions.
Kind regards
Mel

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] < b6
Sent: Wednesday, September 2, 2020 4:52 PM
To: Melanie Ivarsson < b6
Cc: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6 ; Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 ; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] < b6 ; xsb-Tony Fauci b6 ; Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) < b6 ; Stephen Hoge b6 ; Stephane Bancel b6
Subject: FW: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Hi Mel,

I asked Julie Ledgerwood of NIAID to look at your top 20 sites, as I know she is part of the team that is seeking b5 Julie tells me that she works closely with you, b5

b5

Can you have a look at this right away, and consult with Julie as needed, and see if it would be possible to come up with an updated list of the most critical sites where a surge would help for enrollment of African Americans? I want to be sure that we are putting this effort in the best possible places for it to work.

Thanks, Francis

From: Melanie Ivarsson <b6
Sent: Tuesday, September 1, 2020 5:23 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6>; Stephen Hoge b6; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] <b6; Slaoui, Moncef b6; Stephane Bancel b6; Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) <b6
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Corey MD, Larry b6; Nelson Michael b6; Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] <b6; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] <b6; Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] Andrasik PhD, Michele P b6>; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Dear Francis

Please find attached a deck that provides more detail regarding how these sites were selected. We used the following methodology to filter counties to selection:

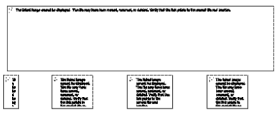
b4,b5

We are of course very happy to be challenged on this list, and if you feel that efforts could be better focused elsewhere then I would be very happy to discuss further. b4,b5

b4,b5

With kind regards
Mel

Melanie Ivarsson, PhD, MBA
Chief Development Officer | Moderna
mobile b6 | modernatx.com



From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] <b6
Sent: Tuesday, September 1, 2020 1:05 PM

To: Melanie Ivarsson [b6]; Stephen Hoge [b6]; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] [b6]; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] [b6]; xsb-Tony Fauci [b6] Slaoui, Moncef [b6]; Stephane Bancel [b6]; Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) [b6]
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] <woodgs@od.nih.gov>; Corey MD, Larry [b6]; Nelson Michael [b6]; Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] [b6]; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] [b6] Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] [b6] Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] [b6]; Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] [b6] Andrasik PhD, Michele P [b6]; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] [b6]
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Hi Melanie,

Before we start moving heaven and earth [b4,b5]

[b4,b5]

Francis

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]
Sent: Monday, August 31, 2020 9:11 PM
To: Melanie Ivarsson [b6]; Stephen Hoge [b6]; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] [b6]; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] [b6]; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] [b6]; Slaoui, Moncef [b6]; Stephane Bancel [b6]; Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) [b6]
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Hi Melanie,

Thanks for this list. Quick question – [b5]

[b5]

I'll pass on this list now to the CEAL team and the COVPN team, and we'll see what can be done to mount a surge.

More on contacts later. I'm glad that the Surgeon General is going to join your 11 AM call with the site PIs.

Francis

From: Melanie Ivarsson [b6]
Sent: Monday, August 31, 2020 8:45 PM

To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]; Stephen Hoge <[b6]>; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] [b6]; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] [b6]; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] [b6]; Slaoui, Moncef [b6]; Stephane Bancel [b6]; Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) [b6]
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Dear Francis

Please find below our proposed list. As described in my email earlier, we have identified states/cities where there are sites that have considerable potential to recruit well [b4,b5]

b4,b5

b4,b5

In addition we are truly thrilled that Dr Adams will be joining our PI call tomorrow.

I will email you separately about the utilization of the CoVPN registry.

b4,b5

b4,b5

With kind regards
Mel

Melanie Ivarsson, PhD, MBA
Chief Development Officer | Moderna
mobile b6 | modernatx.com

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Monday, August 31, 2020 7:56 PM
To: Melanie Ivarsson b6; Stephen Hoge b6 Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 xsb-Tony Fauci b6; Slaoui, Moncef b6 Stephane Bancel b6 Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) b6
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Dear Melanie,

Thanks for this follow up note, I've been hoping to see your list today of the most important sites where we could collectively mount a "surge" effort. I will look forward to seeing that later tonight. b4,b5 b4,b5 I can't speak for the schedules of the Surgeon General or Dr. Fauci, but I very much hope one or both of them could join your PI meeting tomorrow. We have to make this happen, and quickly!

I also had the chance to meet with the leadership of the NIH community engagement effort today. b4,b5

b4,b5

One of our questions is the following – b4,b5

b4,b5

Best, Francis

From: Melanie Ivarsson b6
Sent: Monday, August 31, 2020 6:59 PM
To: Stephen Hoge b6 Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID)

[E] b6 ; Slaoui, Moncef < b6 >; Stephane Bancel
b6 Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) b6
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] < b6
Subject: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Dear all

I wanted to follow up from our very constructive call on Saturday morning.

Drs Fauci and Adams – we met with some of the PIs this morning and talked about the potential for you both to do some specific outreach. There was great enthusiasm for this. In addition we would very much like to invite you to a meeting with all of our PIs together so that you would have the opportunity to communicate with all of them directly about their important mission to increase the enrollment of a more diverse population in this study. Our next PI meeting is tomorrow (Tuesday) at 11am -12 pm EST. We bring all of our PIs together to talk about important study updates – hearing from you would be so impactful. Could either of you be available for 15 mins to join and meet with the PIs? If this is too short notice then could I perhaps work with your offices to find a time this week that would work?

With regards to **the site list**, we have been working on this over the weekend and should have the finalized list ready tonight. The methodology we have used is as follows using CDC data and the PAWG model:

b4,b5

We believe that these criteria will identify a list of sites which have the greatest potential to recruit an African American population. Our digital team are just performing one last cross-check tonight and then we will get this to you. We would then be happy to work with your offices to identify the best way to reach out to these communities and do local press etc.

Please let me know if you have any questions and do let me know if you could attend our PI meeting tomorrow as our special guest of honor!!
Kind regards
Mel

From: Stephen Hoge < b6
Sent: Saturday, August 29, 2020 10:43 PM
To: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6 Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] < b6 ; Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Melanie Ivarsson b6 ; xsb-Tony Fauci b6 ; Slaoui, Moncef b6 ; Stephane Bancel b6 Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) < b6
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: Re: Follow up actions items from Moderna Enrollment Status discussion this morning

Francis,

Thanks for calling us together and for the comprehensive summary. I also want to thank everyone else for the offers to help as well. We are very grateful.

I have just one clarification for the summary. b4,b5

b4,b5

Thank you again for your help. We look forward to working together to close this gap.

Best regards,
Stephen

Get Outlook for iOS

From: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6
Sent: Saturday, August 29, 2020 7:59 PM
To: Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E]; Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]; Melanie Ivarsson; Stephen Hoge; xsb-Tony Fauci; Slaoui, Moncef; Stephane Bancel; Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH)
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E]
Subject: RE: Follow up actions items from Moderna Enrollment Status discussion this morning

Francis, summary looks good.

One question b4,b5

b4,b5

John

From: Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
Sent: Saturday, August 29, 2020 5:07 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Melanie Ivarsson b6; Stephen Hoge b6 Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6 Slaoui, Moncef b6 Stephane Bancel b6 Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) b6
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: Re: Follow up actions items from Moderna Enrollment Status discussion this morning

One edit tracked – addition of the bullet below:

b5

Cliff

From: "Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]" b6
Date: Saturday, August 29, 2020 at 4:40 PM
To: Melanie Ivarsson b6, Stephen Hoge b6 Anthony Fauci b6 "Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E]" b6 "Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]" b6 "Slaoui, Moncef" b6, Stephane Bancel b6 Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH)" b6
Cc: "Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E]" b6
Subject: RE: Follow up actions items from Moderna Enrollment Status discussion this morning

Hi all,

Thanks for the follow up note, Melanie. Attached is a brief summary of the Zoom call from this morning, including action items. Everyone please send me any corrections or additions. I'm looping in Gretchen Wood to ask her to set up another Zoom call for 10 AM EDT on Saturday September 5.

Francis

From: Melanie Ivarsson [b6]
Sent: Saturday, August 29, 2020 12:09 PM
To: Stephen Hoge [b6] Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] [b6] Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] [b6]; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] [b6]; Slaoui, Moncef [b6] Stephane Bancel [b6]; Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) [b6]
Subject: Follow up actions items from Moderna Enrollment Status discussion this morning

Dear all

Thank you so much for a really supportive and constructive meeting this morning. We are extremely appreciative of your insights and suggestions and in particular offers of help. Diversity in the enrollment of the COVE study is absolutely the most important thing that we are focusing on at Moderna at the moment, but we know that there is always more that can be done and welcome all additional thoughts and suggestions.

As discussed we will develop a priority list of sites where we feel your help in outreach would be the most impactful. We will then work to arrange for Drs Fauci and Adams to directly connect with those communities and sites. I will have this list available on Monday.

We look forward to our call with you next Saturday. I hope you all have a good weekend.

With kind regards
Mel

Melanie Ivarsson, PhD, MBA
Chief Development Officer | Moderna
mobile [b6] modernatx.com

From: Stephen Hoge [b6]
Sent: Saturday, August 29, 2020 9:52 AM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]; xsb-Tony Fauci [b6]; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] [b6]; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] [b6] Slaoui, Moncef [b6]; Stephane Bancel [b6] Melanie Ivarsson [b6]
Subject: RE: Moderna Enrollment Status

All,

Attached please find a few slides that we hope will be useful to frame the discussion this morning. We would be happy to run through them quickly (10-15 minutes) upfront.

Best regards,
Stephen

-----Original Appointment-----
From: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Friday, August 28, 2020 8:07 AM
To: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E]; Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]; xsb-Tony Fauci; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E]; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]; Slaoui, Moncef; Stephane Bancel; Stephen Hoge; Melanie Ivarsson
Subject: Moderna Enrollment Status
When: Saturday, August 29, 2020 10:00 AM-11:00 AM (UTC-05:00) Eastern Time (US & Canada).
Where: b6

Gretchen Wood is inviting you to a scheduled ZoomGov meeting.

Join ZoomGov Meeting
b6

Meeting ID: b6
Passcode: b6
One tap mobile
b6 US (San Jose)
US (New York)

Dial by your location
b6 US (San Jose)
US (New York)
Meeting ID: b6
Passcode: b6
Find your local number: b6

Join by SIP
b6

Join by H.323
b6 (US West)
(US East)
Meeting ID: b6
Passcode: b6

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From: Lowy, Douglas (NIH/NCI) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=F1B7B8FE4739478BB17840C56902718A-LOWYD]
Sent: 7/20/2020 10:32:10 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=410e1ca313f44ced9938e50d2ff0b6c2-collinsf]
CC: Wholley, David (FNIH) [T] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=cd9e702fcf28414883d0b6996d677257-wholleyd]; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=7f78b40a596b4ca4a2850a429d1ae3f2-jmascola]; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=2d7e368a3137473bbce161547a82f2de-clane]; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=df38103d75134f658ae2d356f0396b94-afauci]
Subject: Re: Gallo and OPV

Thanks, Doug

From: "Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]" [redacted]
Date: Monday, July 20, 2020 at 5:11 PM
To: "Lowy, Douglas (NIH/NCI) [E]" [redacted]
Cc: "Wholley, David (FNIH) [T]" [redacted] "Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]" [redacted] "Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E]" [redacted] "Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [redacted]
Subject: RE: Gallo and OPV

I think a written response after Wednesday would be sufficient.

Tx, Francis

From: Lowy, Douglas (NIH/NCI) [E] [redacted]
Sent: Monday, July 20, 2020 5:03 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [redacted]
Cc: Wholley, David (FNIH) [T] [redacted] Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] [redacted] Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] [redacted] Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] [redacted]
Subject: Re: Gallo and OPV

Hi Francis,

As I mentioned at last week's ACTIV Executive Committee meeting, the vaccine working group listened to an invited presentation from Bob Gallo, who proposed two different clinical trials of oral poliovirus vaccine (OPV): a randomized controlled trial and/or a challenge study with a respiratory virus other than SARS-CoV-2, such as influenza or a standard coronavirus. In looking at the data for OPV, it appears to be observational. With BCG, by contrast, there are quite a few randomized controlled clinical trials and experimental studies that document its ability to reduce the risk of infection/disease attributable to other infectious agents. Currently, there are several RCT's being conducted in the US and other countries that are assessing the ability of BCG to reduce the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection/disease.

The vaccine working group is planning to discuss this topic at its Wednesday meeting, and I am wondering what, if anything, you would like to do with the outcome of that discussion. Write back to Bob, or more than that?

Thanks,
Doug

From: "Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E]"
Date: Friday, July 3, 2020 at 12:07 PM
To: "Lowy, Douglas (NIH/NCI) [E]" , "Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]" Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E]" "Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]" >
Cc: "Wholley, David (FNIH) [T]"
Subject: RE: Gallo and OPV

b5

From: Lowy, Douglas (NIH/NCI) [E] <
Sent: Friday, July 3, 2020 11:54 AM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]
Cc: Wholley, David (FNIH) [T]
Subject: Re: Gallo and OPV

Hi Francis: **b5** Doug

From: "Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]"
Date: Friday, July 3, 2020 at 11:46 AM
To: "Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E]" , "Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E]" Lowy, Douglas (NIH/NCI) [E]" "Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]" >
Cc: "Wholley, David (FNIH) [T]"
Subject: RE: Gallo and OPV

Hi Tony, Cliff, Doug, and John (and looping in David)

b5

Tx, Francis

From: Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E]
Sent: Sunday, May 3, 2020 1:45 PM
To: Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] <
Cc: Lowy, Douglas (NIH/NCI) [E >; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E
Subject: RE: Gallo and OPV

Totally agree with Cliff's advice.

Anthony S. Fauci, MD
Director
National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
Building 31, Room 7A-03
31 Center Drive, MSC 2520

National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892-2520
Phone:
FAX: (301) 496-4409
E-mail:

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From: Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] <
Sent: Sunday, May 3, 2020 1:22 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD)
Cc: Lowy, Douglas (NIH/NCI) Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] <
Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]
Subject: Re: Gallo and OPV

Francis,

b5

Cliff

On May 3, 2020, at 12:55 PM, Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] wrote:

Hi all,

b5

Francis

From: Gallo, Robert
Sent: Sunday, May 3, 2020 12:07 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]
Subject: RE: Your query to Dr. Kadlec

Dear Francis,

It was a pleasure to hear from you, and yes, it has been a long time since we met or even spoke. Moons ago I was set to write to you after reading your wonderful book, but I ended up instead speaking with others about it. I should add at this point that I did not quickly respond to your email of a few days ago because I simply missed it.

It is true that I strongly suggest that OPV be quickly (already it is not quickly) brought forward for induction of a strong innate immune response to prevent or markedly reduce SARS-CoV-2 infection and/or severity until the field obtains a proven safe and efficacious vaccine producing

a long lasting, adaptive immunity. OPV is very safe (notably for OPV 1 and 3 as bOPV which we will use and completely safe in a vaccinated population), simple, cheap, rather obvious, yet unique among the massive number of vaccines many (maybe most) of which are the same or at least if not exactly the same aiming at the same mechanism (targeting the spike and searching for the putative correlate of neutralizing Abs.).

OPV should work for a few months and possibly longer. Also it should be working multiple times so I think could cover more than a few months, giving us time for a proven vaccine of adaptive immunity, which might be very long lasting as is hoped.

In the main the WHO comments are correct. Of course we sought and have letters of support from them as well as from many others. Though they are again supportive in their notes to you, there is one item that surprises me. They add that there was no clinical efficacy results as yet. They know or certainly should know that there is plenty of clinical data for this concept with BCG, OPV, and live Measles vaccine. Needless to say this is what turned me on during our regular Global Virus Network (GVN)conference calls. (Incidentally GVN is an organization I have thought of bringing to your attention. I think you would find it impressive and useful). I would be happy to share with you the clinical observations with OPV if you wish.

I would like to take a small diversion, but I suspect you are aware of these things. My colleagues and I respect the WHO because of its representation and because we have colleagues/friends there as well. However, sometimes bureaucracy of a massive degree leads to inaction or even much worse-- political expediency. I won't bother you with details of these unless you ask, but I had such experiences with HTLV-1 which we discovered in 1980 as the 1st human retrovirus and which cause not only the highest incidence of cancer (% of infections) of any virus and other fatal diseases as well but mainly in less developed countries (plus Japan) and again with HIV in 1984. Behavior was not beneficial. Perhaps it will be of relevance in the future because a few at WHO took a position to remove OPV (Sabin) in favor of IPV (Salk) in their polio eradication scheme. It was a huge failure. As my FDA collaborator, Konstantin Chumakov, says "Blessed be Bill Gates" because he saved OPV and saved the day and in so doing has produced a still better OPV.

There is indeed data also for BCG as well as live Measles though I know less of the latter. BCG is less available, requires injection, harder to make, not as safe, and we think unlikely to be as effective as OPV. Nonetheless, we favor its use too. The mechanisms will be similar.

You asked whether monkey trials are planned. For several reasons definitely not --though we are planning some monkey experiments, but not large enough for "clinical" conclusions. The main reasons are: 1) cost; 2) that billions not thousands or millions have received OPV safely and in our collective view (and we know the studies pretty well) protection has been clinically shown; 3) In a pandemic we wished to move quickly (so far we must say that has not been achieved). A typical monkey vaccine study will take time, but 4) in this case it would be a huge amount of lost time as monkeys require great doses of polio for infection and monkeys have to be trained to drink their orange juice. It would be hard to imagine that such studies would even give us useful information.

On a final digression Francis I have had 36 years of on/off experiences with glycosylated spike proteins—their analyses immunologically and especially regarding use in vaccines and developing neutralizing Abs. I believe it will be a mistake to put most eggs in that basket. The

risks: shortened antibody half life; 2) protection NOT correlating with neutralizing Abs; 3) sometimes hazards from them. Admittedly, they might work, but I trust and hope that not everything is going in this bag. If you wish to discuss this again I will be available.

Finally, I hd no idea you were into vaccines or SARS-2 nor any part of CoVID-19 disease, but I am very happy to learn this.

Thanks.

Bob Gallo

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [redacted]
Sent: Thursday, April 30, 2020 5:00 PM
To: Gallo, Robert [redacted]
Cc: Disbrow, Gary (OS/ASPR/BARDA) [redacted] Kadlec, Robert (OS/ASPR/IO) [redacted] Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] [redacted] Shuy, Bryan (OS/ASPR/IO) [redacted] Johnson, Robert (OS/ASPR/BARDA) [redacted] Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] [redacted] Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] [redacted]
Subject: Your query to Dr. Kadlec

CAUTION: This message originated from a non UMB, UMSOM, FPI, or UMMS email system. Whether the sender is known or not known, hover over any links before clicking and use caution opening attachments.

Dear Bob,

It's been quite a while since we've chatted. Bob Kadlec asked me to respond to your query about the possible use of OPV to activate innate immunity and provide COVID-19 protection. Has this been tested in a non-human primate model? I note the recommendation below that says a clinical trial is planned – can you tell me more about that?

As you can imagine, we are all flat out on the vaccine development pathway!

Francis

The use of oral polio vaccine (OPV) to prevent SARS-CoV2 (Polio Eradication Campaign)

There is no evidence that oral poliovirus vaccine (OPV) protects people against infection with COVID-19 virus.

A clinical trial addressing this question is planned in the USA, and WHO will evaluate the evidence when it is available.

In the absence of evidence, WHO does not recommend OPV vaccination for the prevention of COVID-19. WHO continues to recommend OPV as part of essential immunization services to prevent poliomyelitis and as part of global polio eradication efforts.

There are experimental signals from various studies over the years that OPV has non-specific effects on the immune system. These effects have not been well characterized and their clinical relevance is unknown. Such non-specific effects may not be limited to OPV, as other live

vaccines have also been associated with non-specific protective effects (such as BCG vaccine against tuberculosis). Nonlive vaccines in contrast do not seem to have the same effects.

The exact mechanism of non-specific protection induced by live vaccines needs to be elucidated further. Clinical studies could begin immediately because the vaccines in question are licensed and have an excellent safety record. Clinical trials involving off-label use of various drugs licensed for other indications are currently underway. The existing scientific rationale suggests that the same should be done for OPV and other live vaccines. A study is currently being discussed with various partners and vaccine manufacturers, including the US FDA, the outcomes of which will be carefully assessed to determine potential use in the context of the spread of SARS-CoV2 until the time when specific vaccines and antiviral therapies are ready.

From: Kadlec, Robert (OS/ASPR/IO) [redacted]
Sent: Thursday, April 30, 2020 10:28 AM
To: Gallo, Robert [redacted] Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [redacted]
Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] [redacted]; Shuy, Bryan (OS/ASPR/IO)
[redacted]
Subject: Re: Respone

Dr Gallo thank you for your note and I appreciate you reaching out to me. I have copied Dr Collins and Dr Tabak to consider the ACTIV forum they have created to bring industry academia and government to consider scientific base approaches That you have described. Dr Collins has organized a vaccine group and I assess could be the best and fastest place to discuss your concept. I am sure they will connect with you soonest

Best

Bob Kadlec.

Sent from my iPhone

> On Apr 30, 2020, at 10:02 AM, Gallo, Robert [redacted] wrote:
>
> Dear Dr. Kaldec,
>
> I have not heard from you in over a week. You mentioned getting back to me in a day or two. Time is passing. I am asking you to look at OPV 1 plus 3 serotypes as a bivalent, completely safe vaccine with powerful stimulation of innate immunity lasting several weeks , which can be given a second or third time, and with a historical track record of preventing other infections from entirely different RNA viruses (such as protecting against influenza). Therefore, it should be really helpful for some months, and I think get us past a second wave of SARS-CoV-2, and help people return to work safely. I don't understand delays or apparent lack of interest. Who can possibly be against this? If you hear of hypothetical problems we can show you that these are false. Just ask the questions, and we can give you the evidence.
>
> However, no answer from you suggests no interest and must quickly make alternative pathways. I am though quite surprised and fear you are receiving

"fake news" if you will pardon the expression. Some have been against this who defend their old and failed position on polio eradication with their promotion of the use of the inactivated polio virus vaccine. Please note that in the US between 1962 and 1985 we received (safely) the oral polio (OPV). Moreover, if vaccinated already there has not been a single case of a complication and BILLIONS have received it. No it will not last long as innate immunity is short lived, but we strongly believe that we can break the back of the SARS-CoVID-2 spread. Also note that this is what Bill Gates is doing now in India and much of the Eastern hemisphere.

There are countries outside the US wanting to move fast on this. We are waiting for your reply.

Robert Gallo
Director, Institute of Human Virology,
Professor of Medicine and Professor of Microbiology,
UMB, School of Medicine, Baltimore,

And
Co-founder and International Science Advisor of the Global Virus Network (GVN)

From: Slaoui, Moncef b6
Sent: 8/5/2020 1:46:25 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=410e1ca313f44ced9938e50d2ff0b6c2-collinsf]
Subject: Re: quick question about vaccine trial coordination

Ok thank you

Moncef
Tel: b6

On Aug 5, 2020, at 9:45 AM, Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 wrote:

I'll call you at 11:45

From: Slaoui, Moncef b6
Sent: Wednesday, August 5, 2020 9:11 AM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: Re: quick question about vaccine trial coordination

Francis
I have an external board meeting that I chair and I can't change or miss it
I can talk at 11:45 or 11:50
If you can

Moncef
Tel: b6

On Aug 5, 2020, at 9:09 AM, Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 wrote:

Would you be free for a call at noon today?

From: Slaoui, Moncef b6
Sent: Tuesday, August 4, 2020 8:36 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: Re: quick question about vaccine trial coordination

Hi Francis
Thanks for your note and question
There is of course no reason to object to this and b5

b5

Maybe we could have a Quick call tomorrow to share more before a decision is made
Let me know

All the best

Moncef
Tel: b6

On Aug 4, 2020, at 8:17 PM, Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]
b6 > wrote:

Hi Moncef,

I have had a couple of conversations with Mikael Dolsten about ways to be sure that we learn everything possible about the path to success for COVID-19 vaccine trials, b5 Mikael is amenable to a meeting every two weeks to compare notes – initially between the Moderna and Pfizer trials, but potentially others as they get underway. b5 b5

I have two questions for you: 1) b5
2) b5
b5

b5

Best, Francis

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=410E1CA313F44CED9938E50D2FF0B6C2-COLLINSF]
Sent: 6/17/2020 11:54:32 AM
To: Wholley, David (FNIH) [T] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=cd9e702fcf28414883d0b6996d677257-wholleyd]
Subject: FW:
Attachments: Dr. Janet Woodcock.pdf

From: Woodcock, Janet [b6]
Sent: Wednesday, June 17, 2020 7:31 AM
To: Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] [b6] Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]
Subject: FW:

For discussion, or has this issue been resolved? jw

From: Susan J Kurkowski [b6] **On Behalf Of** David A Ricks
Sent: Wednesday, June 17, 2020 7:27 AM
To: Woodcock, Janet [b6]
Subject:

David A. Ricks
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Eli Lilly and Company
Lilly Corporate Center, Indianapolis, IN 46285 U.S.A.
[b6] (office) | 317.276.0679 (fax)
[b6] | www.lilly.com

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From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=410E1CA313F44CED9938E50D2FF0B6C2-COLLINSF]
Sent: 5/3/2020 10:50:34 PM
To: Gallo, Robert [b6]
Subject: RE: Your query to Dr. Kadlec

Thanks for your note and this important context, Bob.

I have passed along your notes and background information to the Vaccines experts at NIAID and at the ACTIV public-private partnership (see https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/nih-launch-public-private-partnership-speed-covid-19-vaccine-treatment-options).

Best, Francis

From: Gallo, Robert [b6]
Sent: Sunday, May 3, 2020 12:07 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]
Subject: RE: Your query to Dr. Kadlec

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Thanks.

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From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Thursday, April 30, 2020 5:00 PM
To: Gallo, Robert b6
Cc: Disbrow, Gary (OS/ASPR/BARDA) b6; Kadlec, Robert (OS/ASPR/IO) b6
Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Shuy, Bryan (OS/ASPR/IO) b6; Johnson, Robert (OS/ASPR/BARDA) b6 Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
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From: Kadlec, Robert (OS/ASPR/IO) < b6
Sent: Thursday, April 30, 2020 10:28 AM
To: Gallo, Robert < b6 Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6 ; Shuy, Bryan (OS/ASPR/IO) b6
Subject: Re: Respone

Dr Gallo thank you for your note and I appreciate you reaching out to me. I have copied Dr Collins and Dr Tabak to consider the ACTIV forum they have created to bring industry academia and government to consider scientific base approaches That you have described. Dr Collins has organized a vaccine group and I assess could be the best and fastest place to discuss your concept. I am sure they will connect with you soonest

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Bob Kadlec.

Sent from my iPhone

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Robert Gallo
Director, Institute of Human Virology,
Professor of Medicine and Professor of Microbiology,
UMB, School of Medicine, Baltimore,

And
Co-founder and International Science Advisor of the Global Virus Network (GVN)

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=410E1CA313F44CED9938E50D2FF0B6C2-COLLINSF]
Sent: 2/14/2021 5:20:26 PM
To: Wholley, David (FNIH) [T] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=cd9e702fcf28414883d0b6996d677257-wholleyd]
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] a few follow ups

Good question, but since Mikael didn't specifically ask for that, b4,b5 I think the focus of the call will be on a discussion b4,b5 b4,b5

FC

From: Wholley, David (FNIH) [T] b6
Sent: Sunday, February 14, 2021 7:11 AM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] a few follow ups

Francis –
Happy to join this call. It's hard to tell from Mikael's note below, b4,b5 b4,b5

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Saturday, February 13, 2021 11:17 AM
To: Dolsten, Mikael b6
Cc: Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Wholley, David (FNIH) [T] b6 Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] < b6 >; Barasch, Kimberly (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Conrad, Patricia (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] a few follow ups

Hi Mikael,

I've discussed with Tony, and we are very interested in meeting with you and your team. I'd like Tony, Cliff Lane, David Wholley, and me to join, and you can decide which of the Pfizer team would be most essential.

I'm looping in Gretchen Wood who can work with your Pfizer team to find a good time for this. Tuesday may be a challenge, but all of us will seek to move calendars around if necessary.

Best, Francis

From: Dolsten, Mikael < b6
Sent: Friday, February 12, 2021 2:32 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] a few follow ups

Francis

If you prefer a smaller group , I am pleased also to present the protease drug highlights myself and john together w our CEO Albert Bourla from Pfizer to meet the three of you

Best
Mikael

Sent from my iPhone

On Feb 12, 2021, at 14:16, Dolsten, Mikael b6 wrote:

Dear Francis

I and our Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla just reviewed the clinical plans from our protease inhibitor team . b4,b5

b4,b5

We would enjoy as you suggested below meeting you , Tony and David as soon as possible - maybe Tuesday next week (Monday is holiday) to discuss b4,b5 b4,b5

In this time of SARSCov2 viral evolution , they seems like a drug class w great promise .

b4,b5

Albert will join me in the meeting w you. If you want to have some more detailed background science on the drugs , I was thinking to bring in our two key scientist leaders in this area eg b4,b5 b4,b5 ACTIV since the start within therapeutics related work streams .

Look forward to your response

Best
Mikael

Sent from my iPhone

On Feb 11, 2021, at 05:26, Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 wrote:

Hi Mikael,

Thanks for quick response to my message – and wow, the progress on the oral anti-protease is fantastic! In the face of rising concerns about viral variants in the spike protein, the efficacy against all coronaviruses is extremely encouraging

b4,b5

Let me know when you are ready to discuss – I'd like to bring Tony Fauci and David Wholley into that conversation soon.

Best, Francis

From: Dolsten, Mikael b6
Sent: Wednesday, February 10, 2021 8:36 AM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] a few follow ups

Hi Francis

Good that you try to correct NYT article but TIME paper was great

The exciting piece w the antiviral protease inhibitor (PI) drugs is that they are pan-corona virus active w potential as a drug for any new pandemic coronavirus. They also will inhibit all presently known SARSCov2 mutant variants that mainly affect SPIKE

Confidential update

b4,b5

Look forward to discuss and a possible promising anti viral partnership

Mikael

Sent from my iPhone

On Feb 10, 2021, at 06:33, Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]
b6 wrote:

Hi Mikael,

Just checking in. First, thanks for your kind words that were quoted in the TIME magazine profile – very much appreciated!

Second, I have been distressed by the uninformed characterization of the ACTIV efforts on therapeutics in the New York Times article ten days ago by Carl Zimmer, and a more recent OpEd from Zeke Emanuel et al. The TIME article gave a much more accurate depiction, and I hope that was noticed. My staff and I are working in other ways to correct the record on this – including an upcoming New Yorker article and 60 Minutes segment that will be much more positive!

Third, I am glad to see positive momentum in moving forward with the Pfizer anti-protease therapeutic through ACTIV. b4,b5

b4,b5

b4,b5 Of course I'm also intensely curious about your progress with an oral anti-protease, since that could be a true game-changer for this pandemic – and an advance desperately needed at a time where new SARS-CoV-2 viral variants are causing a lot of concern. Anything you can tell me about progress there?

All the best, Francis

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=410E1CA313F44CED9938E50D2FF0B6C2-COLLINSF]
Sent: 8/5/2020 2:18:23 PM

Subject: *Call with Dr. Moncef Slaoui
Location: You will dial Moncef on b6

Start: 8/5/2020 3:45:00 PM
End: 8/5/2020 4:00:00 PM
Show Time As: Busy

Recurrence: (none)

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]
Sent: Wednesday, August 5, 2020 9:45 AM
To: Slaoui, Moncef b6
Subject: RE: quick question about vaccine trial coordination

I'll call you at 11:45

From: Slaoui, Moncef b6
Sent: Wednesday, August 5, 2020 9:11 AM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: Re: quick question about vaccine trial coordination

Francis
I have an external board meeting that I chair and I can't change or miss it
I can talk at 11:45 or 11:50
If you can

Moncef
Tel: b6

On Aug 5, 2020, at 9:09 AM, Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 wrote:

Would you be free for a call at noon today?

From: Slaoui, Moncef b6
Sent: Tuesday, August 4, 2020 8:36 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: Re: quick question about vaccine trial coordination

Hi Francis
Thanks for your note and question
There is of course no reason to object to this and b5
b5

b5

Maybe we could have a Quick call tomorrow to share more before a decision is made
Let me know
All the best

Moncef
Tel: b6

On Aug 4, 2020, at 8:17 PM, Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] < b6 wrote:

Hi Moncef,

I have had a couple of conversations with Mikael Dolsten about ways to be sure that we learn everything possible about the path to success for COVID-19 vaccine trials, b5 b5 Mikael is amenable to a meeting every two weeks to compare notes – initially between the Moderna and Pfizer trials, but potentially others as they get underway. b5

I have two questions for you: 1) b5 2) b5

b5

b5

Best, Francis

From: Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=D06F5C7AAD094F6685D9F1D260D46441-PEREZSTABLE]
Sent: 9/10/2020 3:18:28 PM
To: Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=b71b953b50a5495ca0f2869ab13bc407-gibbonsgh]; Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=284d85649e634a0a91bb0b9aac84846c-mensahga]; Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=410e1ca313f44ced9938e50d2ff0b6c2-collinsf]
CC: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=7f78b40a596b4ca4a2850a429d1ae3f2-jmascola]; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=df38103d75134f658ae2d356f0396b94-afauci]; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=02e22836b5ff4e9988e3770cfc7ee770-tabakl]; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=2d7e368a3137473bbce161547a82f2de-clane]; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=059e53e386aa42fea27c7e17a4cc3cd7-johnslen]; Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=b6d6c0a2a0304ca184b0c719bab8d080-hoopermw]
Subject: Re: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Thanks Gary! Keeping to NIH only.

b5

Best

Eliseo

From: "Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" b6
Date: Thursday, September 10, 2020 at 8:27 AM
To: "Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 >, Francis Collins b6
Cc: "Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]" b6 Anthony Fauci b6 "Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E]" b6 Eliseo Perez Stable b6 "Corey MD, Larry" b6 , "Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E]" b6 Nelson Michael b6 "Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" b6 "Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E]" b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Dear Francis and Colleagues,

Please be assured that everyone understands the sense of urgency with this situation and wants this program deployed ASAP.

Our staff is working flat out 24/7 on this b5

b5

Similarly, it should also be recognized that these PIs only submitted proposals for review *2 weeks ago*, b4,b5

b4,b5

I actually believe that our team and these PIs are rising to the challenge and making good progress on a very daunting task under very challenging circumstances.

We appreciate your ongoing understanding and recognize that this public health crisis is testing the patience of all of us. We are committed to working diligently alongside all of you as we all do our very best in service to these underserved communities.

Best regards

Gary

From: Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6
Sent: Thursday, September 10, 2020 7:21 AM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Cc: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6; Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 b6; Corey MD, Larry b6; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Nelson Michael b6; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6; Kathleen Neuzil b6; Marovich, Mary (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Merlin Robb b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Dr. Collins,

Yes. We will update Gary and Eliseo so that they can update you at your meeting on Saturday.
Our CEAL working group will be on stand-by.

Thanks.

-George Mensah

George A. Mensah, MD, FACC, FAHA
Director, Center for Translation Research & Implementation Science

NHLBI | NIH | Bethesda | Maryland | 20892
(P) b6 (F) 301.402.1051 | b6
Twitter.com/NHLBI_Translate

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] < b6
Sent: Thursday, September 10, 2020 7:15 AM
To: Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] < b6 ; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] < b6
Cc: Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 ; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6 ; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] < b6 ; Corey MD, Larry b6 Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 ; Nelson Michael b6 Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] < b6 Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E b6 ; Kathleen Neuzil < b6 ; Marovich, Mary (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Merlin Robb b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

I'm glad to know of this progress. By Saturday's 10 AM call, will it be possible b4,b5
b4,b5
b4,b5 That's what we need right now.

Francis

From: Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6
Sent: Thursday, September 10, 2020 5:55 AM
To: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6
Cc: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 ; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6 ; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 ; Corey MD, Larry b6 Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 ; Nelson Michael b6 ; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 ; Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 ; Kathleen Neuzil b6 Marovich, Mary (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Merlin Robb b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Dear John,

Thanks for sharing this with us. We are pleased to see the momentum in the right direction.
We also agree with you that there is more work to be done.

I wanted to share with you that:

b5

We will keep you posted.
Again, many thanks for the support.

-George Mensah
George A. Mensah, MD, FACC, FAHA
Director, Center for Translation Research & Implementation Science
National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute | National Institutes of Health
6705 Rockledge Drive | Suite 6070 | Bethesda | Maryland | 20892
(P) b6 (F) 301.402.1051 | b6
twitter.com/NHLBI_Translate

From: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6
Sent: Wednesday, September 9, 2020 8:51 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
Cc: Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6; Corey MD, Larry b6 Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Nelson Michael b6 Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 Kathleen Neuzil b6 Marovich, Mary (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Merlin Robb b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

All,

We had productive weekly OWS leadership call with Moderna today – b4,b5

b4,b5

b4,b5

Greatly appreciate the efforts of all involved – I think we will make real progress. This would not be possible without this concerted all NIH effort.

Best,
John

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Sunday, September 6, 2020 4:09 PM
To: Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] <jmascola@mail.nih.gov>; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
Cc: Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 Corey MD, Larry b6 Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Nelson Michael b6 Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6; Kathleen Neuzil b6 Marovich, Mary (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Merlin Robb b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Excellent indeed!

From: Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6
Sent: Sunday, September 6, 2020 2:43 PM
To: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6 Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
Cc: Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] < b6 ; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6 ; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 Corey MD, Larry b6 Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Nelson Michael b6 ; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] < b6 ; Kathleen Neuzil < b6 ; Marovich, Mary (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Merlin Robb b6
Subject: Re: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Excellent! This is very helpful confirmation/validation of what we heard and took away. I think we are all aligned as you outlined Francis.

b5

This alignment validation within NIH is helpful as we prepare to meet with Mel and Stephen today at 4 ; and take a deeper dice to get increasingly more granular and concrete on action steps.

Will keep you posted as things progress.

Best

Gary

From: "Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]" b6
Date: Sunday, September 6, 2020 at 2:24:32 PM
To: "Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]" b6 "Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" b6 "Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E]" b6
Cc: "Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E]" b6 , "Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E]" b6 "Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E]" b6 "Corey MD, Larry" b6 , "Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E]" b6 "Nelson Michael" b6 , "Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" b6 "Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" b6 "Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E]" b6 "Kathleen Neuzil" b6 "Marovich, Mary (NIH/NIAID) [E]" b6 "Merlin Robb" b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Francis, Gary,

Yes, as noted immediately below. b5 b5

b5

b5

b5 but this is easy to establish.

John

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Sunday, September 6, 2020 1:54 PM
To: Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
Cc: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6; Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6; Corey MD, Larry b6; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Nelson Michael b6; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

HI Gary,

Thanks for this summary. b5

b5

What I think needs to happen urgently is a deep dive with CEAL b5

b5

If I'm wrong, and you and others on this e-mail think we need another pow-wow before proceeding to the two steps above, please say so – but otherwise, let's proceed to dig in with Moderna ASAP. I'm glad to take part in any of those conversations where my presence would be useful, but I don't want to be rate-limiting.

Francis

From: Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6
Sent: Sunday, September 6, 2020 12:46 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
Cc: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6; Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6; Corey MD, Larry b6 Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Nelson Michael b6; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6
Subject: Re: Moderna COVE site list / follow-up

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the CEAL leadership team, we appreciated the opportunity to participate in Saturday's call with Moderna and our colleagues at OWS and HHS.

In response to Francis' charge/tasking — b5

b5

We obviously defer to the NIAID team as experts in conducting vaccine trials and appreciate your longstanding recognition of the importance of effective community engagement as a best practice for enhancing the recruitment of minority groups into clinical trials.

b5

Best

Gary

From: "Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]" b6
Date: Thursday, September 3, 2020 at 8:42:37 PM
To: "Melanie Ivarsson" b6
Cc: "Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]" <jmascola@mail.nih.gov>, "Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E]" b6, "Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E]" b6 "Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E]" b6 "Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" b6, "Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E]" b6 "Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH)" b6, "Stephen Hoge" b6, "Stephane Bancel" b6, "Corey MD, Larry" b6 Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E]" b6 "Slaoui, Moncef" b6, "Nelson Michael" b6 "Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" b6 "Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" <george.mensah@nih.gov>, "Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E]" b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Hi Mel,

Yes, Julie has reached out and confirmed the conclusions that you outline below. Many thanks for going through this additional analysis step. So now that this is agreed, let's pull all of the resources together ASAP and figure out how to mount a serious surge for African American recruitment in those 20 sites. I'm looping in Larry Corey and Nelson Michael since several of these sites are COVPN. Also re-adding Moncef Slaoui, Cliff Lane, Lenora Johnson, George Mensah, and Monica Hooper to the thread.

Zoom call for some of us is set up again for Saturday 10 am EDT.

Thanks, Francis

From: Melanie Ivarsson b6
Sent: Thursday, September 3, 2020 5:48 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Cc: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6 Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6; Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) b6; Stephen Hoge b6; Stephane Bancel b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Dear Francis

Julie and I met this evening to go through the geographies we have selected for inclusion for focused outreach. It was very helpful to hear about the diligent and thoughtful analysis she has done on this and we really appreciate this.

b4,b5

b4,b5 I believe that she is going to reach out to you directly on this.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any further questions.
Kind regards
Mel

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Wednesday, September 2, 2020 4:52 PM
To: Melanie Ivarsson < b6
Cc: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6 Ledgerwood, Julie (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 ; Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] < b6 ; xsb-Tony Fauci b6 Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 ; Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) < b6 Stephen Hoge b6 Stephane Bancel < b6
Subject: FW: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Hi Mel,

I asked Julie Ledgerwood of NIAID to look at your top 20 sites, as I know she is part of the team that is seeking b4,b5 Julie tells me that she works closely with you, b4,b5

b4,b5

Can you have a look at this right away, and consult with Julie as needed, and see if it would be possible to come up with an updated list of the most critical sites where a surge would help for enrollment of African Americans? I want to be sure that we are putting this effort in the best possible places for it to work.

Thanks, Francis

From: Melanie Ivarsson b6
Sent: Tuesday, September 1, 2020 5:23 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 >; Stephen Hoge b6 , Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6 Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 ; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] < b6 Slaoui, Moncef < b6 Stephane Bancel b6 Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) b6
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] < b6 Corey MD, Larry < b6 ; Nelson Michael b6 Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] < b6 Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] < b6 Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] < b6 Andrasik PhD, Michele P b6 >; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Dear Francis

Please find attached a deck that provides more detail regarding how these sites were selected. We used the following methodology to filter counties to selection:

b4,b5

We are of course very happy to be challenged on this list, and if you feel that efforts could be better focused elsewhere then I would be very happy to discuss further. b4,b5
b4,b5

With kind regards
Mel

Melanie Ivarsson, PhD, MBA
Chief Development Officer | Moderna
mobile b6 modernatx.com

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Tuesday, September 1, 2020 1:05 PM
To: Melanie Ivarsson < b6 >; Stephen Hoge < b6 > Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6 >; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 ; xsb-Tony Fauci b6 Slaoui, Moncef b6 Stephane Bancel b6 Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) b6
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] < b6 ; Corey MD, Larry b6 Nelson Michael b6 Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E] < b6 Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E] b6 Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6 Mensah, George (NIH/NHLBI) [E] b6 Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E] Andrasik PhD, Michele F b6 >; Johnson, Lenora (NIH/NHLBI) [E b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Hi Melanie,

Before we start moving heaven and earth b4,b5

b4,b5

Francis

From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]
Sent: Monday, August 31, 2020 9:11 PM
To: Melanie Ivarsson b6 ; Stephen Hoge b6 Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6 Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 ; Slaoui, Moncef b6 ; Stephane Bancel b6 Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) < b6
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Hi Melanie,

Thanks for this list. Quick question – b5

b5

b5

I'll pass on this list now to the CEAL team and the COVPN team, and we'll see what can be done to mount a surge.

More on contacts later. I'm glad that the Surgeon General is going to join your 11 AM call with the site PIs.

Francis

From: Melanie Ivarsson <b6
Sent: Monday, August 31, 2020 8:45 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] <b6 Stephen Hoge <b6 Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] <b6 ; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 ; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] <b6 Slaoui, Moncef b6 ; Stephane Bancel <b6 Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) <b6
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Dear Francis

Please find below our proposed list. As described in my email earlier, we have identified states/cities where there are sites that have considerable potential to recruit well b4,b5

b4,b5

b4,b5

In addition we are truly thrilled that Dr Adams will be joining our PI call tomorrow.

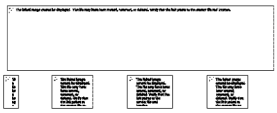
I will email you separately about the utilization of the CoVPN registry.

b4,b5

b4,b5

With kind regards
Mel

Melanie Ivarsson, PhD, MBA
Chief Development Officer | Moderna
mobile b6 modernatx.com



From: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Monday, August 31, 2020 7:56 PM
To: Melanie Ivarsson b6; Stephen Hoge b6; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; xsb-Tony Fauci b6; Slaoui, Moncef b6; Stephane Bancel b6; Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) b6
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: RE: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Dear Melanie,

Thanks for this follow up note, I've been hoping to see your list today of the most important sites where we could collectively mount a "surge" effort. I will look forward to seeing that later tonight. b4,b5 b4,b5 I can't speak for the schedules of the Surgeon General or Dr. Fauci, but I very much hope one or both of them could join your PI meeting tomorrow. We have to make this happen, and quickly!

I also had the chance to meet with the leadership of the NIH community engagement effort today. b4,b5

b4,b5

One of our questions is the following – b4,b5

b4,b5

Best, Francis

From: Melanie Ivarsson <b6>
Sent: Monday, August 31, 2020 6:59 PM
To: Stephen Hoge <b6>; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] <b6>; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] <b6>; Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] <b6> Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] <b6> Slaoui, Moncef <b6>; Stephane Bancel <b6>; Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) <b6>
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] <b6>
Subject: Moderna COVE site list and request to Drs Fauci and Adams

Dear all

I wanted to follow up from our very constructive call on Saturday morning.

Drs Fauci and Adams – we met with some of the PIs this morning and talked about the potential for you both to do some specific outreach. There was great enthusiasm for this. In addition we would very much like to invite you to a meeting with all of our PIs together so that you would have the opportunity to communicate with all of them directly about their important mission to increase the enrollment of a more diverse population in this study. Our next PI meeting is tomorrow (Tuesday) at 11am -12 pm EST. We bring all of our PIs together to talk about important study updates – hearing from you would be so impactful. Could either of you be available for 15 mins to join and meet with the PIs? If this is too short notice then could I perhaps work with your offices to find a time this week that would work?

With regards to **the site list**, we have been working on this over the weekend and should have the finalized list ready tonight. The methodology we have used is as follows using CDC data and the PAWG model:

b4,b5

b4,b5 Our digital team are just performing one last cross-check tonight and then we will get this to you. We would then be happy to work with your offices to identify the best way to reach out to these communities and do local press etc.

Please let me know if you have any questions and do let me know if you could attend our PI meeting tomorrow as our special guest of honor!!
Kind regards
Mel

From: Stephen Hoge < b6
Sent: Saturday, August 29, 2020 10:43 PM
To: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6 ; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 ; Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 ; Melanie Ivarsson < b6 ; xsb-Tony Fauci b6 Slaoui, Moncef b6 ; Stephane Bancel b6 ; Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) < b6
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: Re: Follow up actions items from Moderna Enrollment Status discussion this morning

Francis,

Thanks for calling us together and for the comprehensive summary. I also want to thank everyone else for the offers to help as well. We are very grateful.

I have just one clarification for the summary. b4,b5

b4,b5

Thank you again for your help. We look forward to working together to close this gap.

Best regards,
Stephen

Get Outlook for iOS

From: Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6
Sent: Saturday, August 29, 2020 7:59 PM
To: Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E]; Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]; Melanie Ivarsson; Stephen Hoge; xsb-Tony Fauci; Slaoui, Moncef; Stephane Bancel; Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH)
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E]
Subject: RE: Follow up actions items from Moderna Enrollment Status discussion this morning

Francis, summary looks good.

One question b4,b5
b4,b5

John

From: Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6
Sent: Saturday, August 29, 2020 5:07 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6 ; Melanie Ivarsson < b6 ; Stephen Hoge < b6 ; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6 Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] < b6 ; Slaoui, Moncef b6 Stephane Bancel b6 ; Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) b6
Cc: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: Re: Follow up actions items from Moderna Enrollment Status discussion this morning

One edit tracked – addition of the bullet below:

b5

Cliff

From: "Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]" b6
Date: Saturday, August 29, 2020 at 4:40 PM
To: Melanie Ivarsson b6, Stephen Hoge b6, Anthony Fauci b6, "Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E]" b6, "Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]" b6 "Slaoui, Moncef" b6, Stephane Bancel b6, "Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH)" b6
Cc: "Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E]" b6
Subject: RE: Follow up actions items from Moderna Enrollment Status discussion this morning

Hi all,

Thanks for the follow up note, Melanie. Attached is a brief summary of the Zoom call from this morning, including action items. Everyone please send me any corrections or additions. I'm looping in Gretchen Wood to ask her to set up another Zoom call for 10 AM EDT on Saturday September 5.

Francis

From: Melanie Ivarsson b6
Sent: Saturday, August 29, 2020 12:09 PM
To: Stephen Hoge b6; Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6; Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] b6; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] b6 Slaoui, Moncef b6; Stephane Bancel b6 Adams, Jerome (HHS/OASH) b6
Subject: Follow up actions items from Moderna Enrollment Status discussion this morning

Dear all

Thank you so much for a really supportive and constructive meeting this morning. We are extremely appreciative of your insights and suggestions and in particular offers of help. Diversity in the enrollment of the COVE study is absolutely the most important thing that we are focusing on at Moderna at the moment, but we know that there is always more that can be done and welcome all additional thoughts and suggestions.

As discussed we will develop a priority list of sites where we feel your help in outreach would be the most impactful. We will then work to arrange for Drs Fauci and Adams to directly connect with those communities and sites. I will have this list available on Monday.

We look forward to our call with you next Saturday. I hope you all have a good weekend.

With kind regards
Mel

Melanie Ivarsson, PhD, MBA
Chief Development Officer | Moderna
mobile b6 | modernatx.com

From: Stephen Hoge [b6]
Sent: Saturday, August 29, 2020 9:52 AM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]; xsb-Tony Fauci [b6] Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E] [b6]>; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E] [b6]; Slaoui, Moncef [b6]; Stephane Bancel [b6] Melanie Ivarsson [b6]
Subject: RE: Moderna Enrollment Status

All,

Attached please find a few slides that we hope will be useful to frame the discussion this morning. We would be happy to run through them quickly (10-15 minutes) upfront.

Best regards,
Stephen

-----Original Appointment-----
From: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E] [b6]
Sent: Friday, August 28, 2020 8:07 AM
To: Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E]; Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E]; xsb-Tony Fauci; Lane, Cliff (NIH/NIAID) [E]; Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]; Slaoui, Moncef; Stephane Bancel; Stephen Hoge; Melanie Ivarsson
Subject: Moderna Enrollment Status
When: Saturday, August 29, 2020 10:00 AM-11:00 AM (UTC-05:00) Eastern Time (US & Canada).
Where: [b6]

Gretchen Wood is inviting you to a scheduled ZoomGov meeting.

Join ZoomGov Meeting
[b6]

Meeting ID: [b6]
Passcode: [b6]
One tap mobile
[b6] US (San Jose)
US (New York)

Dial by your location
[b6] US (San Jose)
US (New York)
Meeting ID: [b6]
Passcode: [b6]
Find your local number: [b6]

Join by SIP
[b6]

Join by H.323

b6 (US West)
(US East)

Meeting ID: b6

Passcode: b6

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From: Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=02E22836B5FF4E9988E3770CFC7EE770-TABAKL]
Sent: 7/10/2020 2:27:30 AM
To: Schwetz, Tara (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=0b1da1e9650d44fa9a9e2d94f24b5035-schwetzta]
Subject: FW: Important - FW: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM
Attachments: Moderna site considerations table_Mapping_2020.07.07.xlsx; Vaccine trial recruitment

He drives me nuts; if this wasn't so important I wouldn't bother encouraging him…

From: "Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E]" b6
Date: Thursday, July 9, 2020 at 10:14 PM
To: "Wilson, Dave (NIH/OD) [E]" b6
Subject: Important - FW: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM

Dave,
Francis would like you to speak for a few minutes but did not hear back from you. I hope you are able to join – if you can please let him know asap.
Thanks
Larry

From: Francis Collins b6
Date: Thursday, July 9, 2020 at 10:05 PM
To: "Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E]" b6, "Austin, Christopher (NIH/NCATS) [E]" b6, "Schwetz, Tara (NIH/OD) [E]" b6, "Perez-Stable, Eliseo (NIH/NIMHD) [E]" b6 "Corey MD, Larry" b6, "Gibbons, Gary (NIH/NHLBI) [E]" b6 "Hooper, Monica (NIH/NIMHD) [E]" b6 "Denny, Joshua (NIH/OD) [E]" b6 "Mascola, John (NIH/VRC) [E]" b6 "Parker, Ashley (NIH/OD) [E]" b6, Nelson Michael b6 "Anderson, James (NIH/OD) [E]" b6, "Clayton, Janine (NIH/OD) [E]" b6, "Wilson, Dave (NIH/OD) [E]" b6 Anthony Fauci b6
Cc: "Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E]" b6, "McManus, Ayanna (NIH/OD) [E]" b6
Subject: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM

Dear Colleagues,

Last Saturday (yes, that was July 4, sorry) we gathered to talk about ways to enhance recruitment of volunteers for the Phase 3 vaccine trials – to be sure that maximum efforts are being made to include groups at highest risk. That would include older individuals, people with chronic illnesses, African-Americans, Latinx, and Native Americans. I sent a note the next day that summarized the plans we developed (attached here for reference).

Larry Corey made available the list of recruitment sites contemplated for the Moderna trial, and some of you have been doing cross referencing to see what kind of connection there might be with NIH programs that already include community outreach efforts. Attached is a table that Chris Austin and his team put together, seeking to capture CTSAs, PETAL sites, and RCMIs that are near those potential sites. The definitions used to generate the table are shown below.

Meanwhile the COVPN was announced, and included a web site for volunteers to sign up and register their interest in possibly being contacted for participation. In just 24 yours, there were more than 30,000 sign-ups (including me and a few of you, I gather).

Today I organized a call with Tony Fauci, John Mascola, Moncef Slaoui, Stephane Bancel (CEO, Moderna) and Stephen Hoge (President, Moderna). We had a really good discussion about the importance of diversity in the vaccine trial recruitment. Stephen presented some of their existing plans through their BARDA-funded CRO (PPD) that is organizing about 2/3 of the sites (the other 1/3 is from NIAID). He made it clear that from his perspective that this diversity of volunteers is both scientifically and socially essential. Each of the CRO sites has been asked to describe their outreach efforts, and will not be activated unless those are satisfactory. Stephen's goal is to at least achieve representation that matches the US population, but he aims to go higher than that because of how COVID has hit certain populations with particular harshness. This all sounded encouraging. But I think we might be able to make this even better.

You should have a Zoom invite on your calendar for 5 PM tomorrow. I have invited Stephen Hoge and his associate Melanie Ivarsson to join the call, and to make a ten minute presentation about their current plans. After that, I would like to have 5 minute presentations from Chris Austin (CTSAs), Eliseo Perez-Stable (NIMHD), Gary Gibbons (NHLBI), and Josh Denny (All of Us). If you really want to show slides, I'll need to get them from you by noon so they can be assembled in to one slide deck for sharing screen. The goal of the meeting is to figure out how to maximize the synergy between our existing resources and trial recruitment. We will be talking specifically about the Moderna trial this time, but keep in mind that other trials (each aiming to recruit 30,000 participants) will be not far behind – as will therapeutic trials for inpatients and outpatients in the same geographic areas.

Thanks for your willingness to pitch in here – it really matters.

Best, Francis

Definitions/Add'l Context/Source Data

1. **CTSA Program Sites**
    a. "NCATS CTSA Hub Exact Location Match" are institutions located within the same county as the proposed CT site.
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2. **PETAL Sites**
    a. Used the survey data from the ACTIV CTC WG and the PETAL roster from the Network PO from NHLBI a few weeks ago.

3. **RCMI Sites**
    a. Public list (updated August 2019): https://www.nimhd.nih.gov/docs/rcmi_082619.pdf

4. **Grayed out rows**
    a. These locations do not have a CTSA, PETAL or RCMI site near them at all. They range from being quite a distance away from a site of the 3 funded networks (e.g. the grayed out TN ones) to very rural areas (e.g. the grayed out TX ones).

From: Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=02E22836B5FF4E9988E3770CFC7EE770-TABAKL]
Sent: 4/24/2020 12:22:55 AM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=410e1ca313f44ced9938e50d2ff0b6c2-collinsf]
Subject: Re: odds and ends for discussion

Thanks Francis, and **my responses in bold purple**.
Larry

From: Francis Collins b6
Date: Thursday, April 23, 2020 at 7:23 PM
To: "Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E]" b6
Subject: RE: odds and ends for discussion

Hi Larry,

Thanks for collecting these odds and ends. See attempted responses below in CAPS.

FC

From: Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2020 6:53 PM
To: Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] b6
Subject: odds and ends for discussion

Francis

- b5
- Tara and I had a good discussion b5
  b5

- b5
- b5
- There was an equal amount of discussion b5
  - b5

I you have time tonight after 8 this evening for a call, please let me know. If that is not convenient let's try and touch base tomorrow (before Sat meeting with Gates folks. DO YOU HAVE TIME AFTER TOMORROW MORNING'S ACTIV CALL (9 AM OR WHENEVER IT ENDS)? Yes, 9-9:15. I speak with Michael and Steve Holland at 9:15 about Steve's "plan" to open up IRP by mid-May. I have some sympathy for CC view on this. b5
b5

Thanks,
Larry

From: Schwetz, Tara (NIH/OD) [E] [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=0B1DA1E9650D44FA9A9E2D94F24B5035-SCHWETZTA]
Sent: 7/10/2020 3:10:50 AM
To: Tabak, Lawrence (NIH/OD) [E] [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=02e22836b5ff4e9988e3770cfc7ee770-tabakl]
Subject: Re: Important - FW: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM

Flag: Follow Up

Sigh…

Tara A. Schwetz, PhD
Associate Deputy Director, NIH
Acting Director, NINR
A: Building 1, Room 138
P: b6 **M:** b6

From: Larry Tabak b6
Date: Thursday, July 9, 2020 at 10:28 PM
To: Tara Schwetz b6
Subject: FW: Important - FW: Vaccine trial enrollment Friday 5 PM

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Cc: "Wood, Gretchen (NIH/OD) [E]" b6 "McManus, Ayanna (NIH/OD) [E]"

b6

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